

HANDFEASTED



A. G. BICKLEY
AND
G. S. CURRYER.

E. J. Still

From her Brother

Ernest

Xmas 1891



HANDBASTED

BY

A. CHARLES BICKLEY

AUTHOR OF "MIDST SURREY HILLS," ETC.

AND

GEORGE S. CURRYER

JOINT AUTHOR OF "THE BARN AT BECCLES," ETC.

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HANDFASTED.



CHAPTER I.

VIXEN, BULLY, AND BRAGGART.

As we have seen, Mrs. Rose was quite disposed to act the part of the good Samaritan; but when she had heard the girl's story she immediately developed into her enthusiastic and unreasoning champion, as was to be expected from a woman whose warm and sympathetic nature had gathered force from long repression. Phil was no less surprised than gratified at the unlooked-for change in his mother's attitude towards Elsie; she transferred the vials of her anger to Crosby and Tyler primarily, both of whom, though

she would not have acknowledged it even to herself, she would have delighted to see writhing under the severest thrashing which even Phil could have bestowed upon them. Against Steele also her indignation was boundless ; but with him she proposed to deal herself, which was hardly a more merciful dispensation, and certainly one not calculated to advance the interests of her charge.

Accordingly, as soon as Elsie was sufficiently recovered to be left, Mrs. Rose, after fortifying her with innumerable directions, put on her hood, and, without telling either Elsie or Phil her destination, set out with excellent heart to give her brother-in-law such a moral scouring as he had not experienced for many a long day.

No task could be imagined more entirely congenial to the taste of the good woman, who had she lived in the days of Deborah and Barak would have joined in the chorus

of denunciation with the gusto of a glad heart. Arrived at Winterbourne, and the house of the saddler, Mrs. Rose opened the door without ceremony and marched in.

The saddler was sulkily taking his evening meal in the company of his wife, who was busily engaged in eating nothing with great ostentation.

“Oh, you can eat, can ’ee? I wonder every blessed mouthful don’t choke ’ee,” was Mrs. Rose’s suggestive, though not too gracious, salutation.

Before Steele could reply his wife had started to her feet, and, embracing her sister, cried, “God bless you, Mary, for your goodness to my poor child!”

“Oh! you’s heard on ’en, has you; an’ pray, how did you hear on’t!”

“Phil sent over and told us. May God bless him, too,” said Mrs. Steele fervently.

“Well, Phil allus were a poor weak fool. I’d none a troubled to let ’ee know, I tell

you. I don't mean you, Sally ; every one knows you've no soul you can call your own, let alone a voice, poor heart. I pities 'ee, sister ; 'tis well 'tis not me as is yon fellow's wife as is sitting there guzzling and cramming his innards. Yes, it's you, I mean," she added, pointing to Steele, who was pretending to be elaborately unconscious of her existence,—“you, Alderman Steele, I mean, do you hear me ?” she almost screamed, exasperated out of all restraint by his nonchalance.

“Aye, I hears 'ee, couldn't well be off ; thou couldst allus make thyself heard when thou wert not wanted.”

“Well, I ha' taken the trouble to come over and tell 'ee—not as thou art worth it—that thy child be in safety.”

“She bean't no child o' mine, I don't care what becomes o' she, a wench as brings——”

“Eh, now let's hear what 'ee's got to say agin her, thou mealy-mouthed, stony-

hearted, whited sepulchre," said Mrs. Rose, with the mixed metaphor peculiar to some phases of female indignation. "Speak up, man, don't 'ee be afeared, I'll listen to 'ee patient enough, though thou be as hard-hearted an old brute as any i' the place. I'll listen to 'ee; what hast to say for thysen, aye? They're agoin' to make 'ee mayor, I've heard tell; pretty bad times for Winterbourne when they be forced to make the likes o' thee mayor! Why don't 'ee speak, man, art struck dumb for thy misdoings? Aye, but I wish thou wert wi' all my heart. Thou need na' nudge me, Sally, I bean't afraid o' he; I bean't his daughter, thank the Lord. Let 'un speak! ain't I askin' him to speak, ain't I come here a' purpose to gie 'en a chance o' clearin' hissen? I'll tell 'ee what it be, Sally, he daren't speak."

"I ain't had no chance to speak," broke in Steele; "but, dom my eyes, if I dunno' act."

“Aye, I dare say thou can act ; a pity it’s such a fine night, ain’t it, Steele ? A foul ’un suits thee better for the turnin’ o’ women out into ! Pity there ain’t snow on the ground an’ frost i’ the air, and a cold wind blowin’ and sawing, for ’ee to turn thy own flesh and blood into most a-naked, after a pamperin’ and a spoilin’ on’t day in and day out. Hold thy noise, Sally ; I will speak, I come over from Hockley a purpose, didn’t I ?”

“Aye, let her talk ; go on, woman, go on and get it over.”

“Yes, I be as strong as thou, Steele, an’ thou knows it ; I ain’t a weak and sickly girl, ’tis only wi’ such that thou canst be brave, Steele. Aye, but thou’dst like to serve me as thou did’st yon poor lass who has the bad luck to call ’ee father ; but thou wouldna’ relish the hidin’ my Phil ’ud gie thee arter ; he’d loosen thy skin for ’ee, uncle or no uncle ; he’d make thy hide

lissome better nor thou canst, tho' thou be'est a saddler. Lord ! but he would drub thee, man."

"Let 'un come and try," growled Steele, who was not a courageous man, and upon whom his sister-in-law's last words had had a very calming effect.

"Hold thy tongue, man ; can't a woman speak i' thy presence ? Here be I wi' the best o' meanin's come all the way from Hockley a purpose to gie thee a chance of clearing thysen, an' I bean't to be allowed to open my mouth. What hast 'ee to say for thysen, aye ? Calls thysen a miserable sinner every blessed Sabbath as comes, do 'ee ? I'll make a miserable sinner o' 'ee afore I've done wi' 'ee ; I'll even make 'ee tell the truth to the Lord for once i' thy lyin' life ! Think I be goin' to let the lass come back to such a man o' sin as thou ? Hold thy tongue, Sally, hold thy tongue : I be too big for 'ee to touch ; it be only weak maids that

he be brave enough to lay finger on. Don't 'ee be afeared for me, Sally. It's well for 'ee as he's a wife as I'm sister to, or I'd e'en tell him what I thought on him, that I would—a gallows-faced gowkhammer, a-sittin' there wi'out a word to say for hissen. 'Let 'un ha' a chance,' Sally? Why, for sure, ain't I bin a-waitin' this half-hour agone for 'ee to speak?"

"I bean't called on to answer to you, or any other meddlin' woman, nor more 'an I be called on to keep open house for scarlet women. Keep the lass if thou wants to. She never darkens my door agin, nor thou either, nor Phil, for that matter."

"No, I'll take care on that 'en, Phil shall none come a-nigh 'ee, I promise 'ee; Phil likes respectable men, he do, not them as threatens women and turns their children out o' doors."

Here Steele rose and said savagely, "Get out o' this. Dost hear?—get out of it."

“Oh, yes,” said Mrs. Rose, curtesying with much humility, “I’ll go; thou dost none think, surely, a respectable woman can feel herself easy in the company o’ such as thou? I be goin’, Steele; I minds the old proverb about them as touches pitch; let the lass come back to *thee*? I’d gladly see her in her coffin first. Aye, good-bye, Sally, I be main sorry for ’ee. I allus told ’ee thou’dst ha’ trouble when thou made up thy mind to marry yon—yon—yon *chap*! I’ll let ’ee know about thy child, if so be as thou hast not the spirit to come and see her for thysen; thou wast allus a poor-hearted ’un, though, ’an it were me, it ’ud take more than such a thing as *that* to keep me away from my child.”

This parting shot was delivered from the door-step, and close under the saddler’s nose, who had been standing for some minutes with the door held open for his unwelcome visitor. Having shaken the dust from off

her feet, Mrs. Rose departed with an easy conscience and a light heart.

As he slouched back into the kitchen, Steele growled, "Well, she be gone, an' strike me dumb if ever she enters this house again while I'm alive. Do you hear, you? A pretty lot o' wimmen folk you be, with your daughter a nameless jade an' your sister a vixen."

"Nay, James, not that; her be a bit rough i' the tongue, I own, but she ha' been good to our Elsie. You wouldna' ha' had the lass die i' the snow; you know you wouldna', whate'er you may say."

"Die! Aye, I'd ha' been glad to Heaven an' she had ha' died afore her shame had ha' been knowed. Curse her! Hark 'ee, woman, if ever I catch 'ee e'en so much as trying to send to yon wench so much as a mouthful o' meat an' she be starving, I'll sell 'ee by inch o' candle to any chuff as be fool enough to buy 'ee; an' if ever 'ee goes to that

vixen's house thou never enters mine again."

"Oh, James, James, don't say such things; you don't mean it; you can't mean it."

"I does mean it, woman; gi'e me the Bible, I'll swear it."

"Nay, thou shalt never do that," cried Mrs. Steele, seizing the Bible and flinging it among the blazing logs.

"'Tis better God's word should burn than that a father should curse his child upon it. Thou canst sell me by auction, thou canst turn me out an' thou dost choose, but, Steele, if thou dost not mind thee that thou art her father, I shanna' forget that Elsie be my child," and, bursting into a flood of tears, the overwrought woman flung out of the kitchen.

"Good sakes alive, what be the matter wi' the woman! 'Tis hard a man can't say 'en's mind wi'out his own wife a-flying at 'en, an' a-tearin' 'en in a manner o' puttin' it. Things

be comin' to a martel pass, surely. 'Od rat it, who's that at the door? Come in, can't 'ee," he shouted angrily, in response to a peremptory knock. "Oh! it be thou, be it? What dost thou want here?" he continued as the door opened and revealed the rubicund visage and portly form of the mayor.

"Good evenin', neighbour Steele; I've a mort o' things to say to 'ee. I be real glad now to see 'ee lookin' so well. There's been bad blood betwixt us, Steele—'tworn't o' my seekin'; but there, 'tis done, and I axes your pardon for what I might ha' said. It be bad for the place for leadin' gildsmen like we to be at enmity, so I be come to make it up wi' 'ee, Steele."

"Be that all, Tyler? Well, come in."

"Thou bean't any too glad to see me, I'm thinkin'," said Tyler, drawing a chair to the fire. "Well, we all has our troubles i' this world, an' thou hast thine."

"Never mind my troubles," said the saddler, "say what thou hast to say. I be in no mood for chaffering."

"Well, neighbour Steele, to come to the point, dost remember lending me a matter o' three pound nigh on fifteen year ago?"

"Aye."

"I had none forgotten it, 'twere a kind deed, a good deed like. Well, here it be, interest an' all," and Tyler put down a little pile of money on the table between them, which Steele counted over slowly, and then allowed to dribble gently into his pocket.

"Yes, that be all right, Tyler. What else hast got to say?"

"Thou wert not at morning-talk, to-day; we ha' been talkin' about 'ee, and pitying on 'ee like, so I thought I'd just drop in an' tell 'ee in a neighbourly and friendly way, in a manner o' puttin' it, how sorry all the gild-men be for 'ee."

"Rot your sorrow!" muttered Steele, "I

want none on't. I wants nowt but to be left alone."

"It be main bad for 'ee, neighbour, but I feels my thanksgivings that thou art not looking so very ill on it. It be a real good thing for 'ee that they folk at Hockley should ha' found the girl; kind o' providential, ain't it, now?"

"I don't want to hear aught about it; if thou's aught else to say, get'en said and ha' done wi' it."

"Well, Steele, I be sure, as a neighbour, thou'lt be glad to hear that all they troubles I come to 'ee about has been mercifully done away. I ha' found a friend to help me, and now I can hold up my head wi' any man i' Winterbourne."

"'Tis good hearin'," said Steele mechanically.

"Ah-h! I knew thou'd be glad to hear 'en. I bean't one o' they folk as is too proud to thank them as has done me a good turn, so

I ha' come here this blessed night to thank thee, neighbour Steele."

"I ha' none helped thee ; what dost mean ? " demanded the saddler uneasily.

"I mean that I thank 'ee, neighbour Steele, for the friendly way in which thou didst help me in the days of my adversity. 'Twor kind on 'ee."

Steele chafed under the banter and twisted uneasily in his chair.

"Where be the good dame ? " continued Tyler. "Folk do say as she be takin' on terrible."

The man's tone displayed such genuine interest that Steele, although the remarks galled him, felt that he was unable to resent as an affront what appeared to have been spoken in all good faith, so he merely said "she be about somewheres."

"Thou mun find the place quiet like wi'out the lass. My Hetty ha' been over to see her to-day ; she do say as she looked

martel bad. 'Twor a strange thing she should a' taken wi' yon town chap ; there, but thou be'est in trouble, neighbour, so I'll none stop. Faithful be the wounds on a friend, but when the heart be sore quiet be good for the wounded spirit. But I canna' go wi'out thanking 'ee again and again for the help thou'st gi'en me."

"Dom thee, man, I ha' gi'en thee no help ; what art drivin' at ? "

"Well—no—mayhap *thou* hast not to thy knowin', but thou hast got a daughter, or rather, I might say, thou hadst a daughter, an' she ha' been my mainstay i' tribulation ; 'tis she as has helped me out o' my troubles and made me able to hold up my head among my fellows ; 'tis she as has put it in my power to pay thee back thy dirty money, Steele. Yes, 'tis thy money, for thy daughter helped me to earn 'en."

A mist seemed to gather before the eyes of the unlucky saddler, as, striking his fist

heavily on the table, he demanded fiercely, "What dost mean?"

"I mean," said Tyler, who had taken a paper from the capacious pocket of his waistcoat, and was proceeding carefully to unfold and smooth it out upon the table close beside the saddler's fist, "I mean that I made a good bargain wi' Master Crosby when I sold thy daughter to him for his handfast."

"You devil!" hissed Steele, as he closed with the mayor, and endeavoured to thrust him into the fire. But the blacksmith shook him off as a mastiff might a terrier, and holding up the paper to the gaze of the wretched man he reiterated in tones of savage exultation, "I persuaded her, I told her 'twor the same as marriage; he paid me handsome for it, an' I did it—I did it. I swore I'd be revenged on 'ee, Steele, and I have been."

Steele rushed upon him again, but the blacksmith was aware, and with a blow sent

him staggering against the opposite wall, then broke into a hoarse and guttural laugh, which suddenly stopped when he found himself seized from behind and his arms pinioned to his sides, while a voice exclaimed, "Open the door, master, open the door." And the next sensation Mr. Tyler experienced was that of being bundled unceremoniously into the darkness outside. Then he heard the saddler's door bang to behind him, and the bolts shot.

CHAPTER II.

A KNIGHT ERRANT.

A NOT inconsiderable portion of Alderman Steele's business lay with the yeomen and farmers in the outlying villages, situate within the radius of a dozen or so miles round Winterbourne; and the period of comparative quiet succeeding the bustle of harvest-tide, and just before ploughing, and the work of the winter generally commenced in downright earnest, was then, as it is now, the time when the good folks overhauled their gear and attended to necessary repairs. Consequently this was the saddler's busy season. The work was as often as not done at the houses of the

customers, and for the past fortnight Samson had been engaged in what may be fitly described as a kind of house-to-house visitation for rough repairs. He had only returned to Winterbourne on this evening, and, after a hasty and solitary meal, had gone into the shop to complete a pressing job.

He had not had much opportunity for conversation with Mattie, as that abigail, besides being, or professing to be, extra busy, had been abnormally taciturn, and, in reply to his inquiry about Elsie, had deigned only to reply, "Her's at Hockley," and had then departed.

Between Steele's kitchen and the shop there was nothing but a rudely-panelled oaken partition, none too well fitted in the first instance, and shrunk by long years of heat on the kitchen side and cold on that of the open shop, and, therefore, pervious to sound. It was in this wise that Samson had

become an unwitting auditor of all that had taken place, and, consequently, had been made sufficiently aware of the unhappy turn events had taken during his absence. At first he had heard as in a dream without comprehending; but gradually, as Mrs. Rose's voice had risen, his nightmare had deepened; his awl had ceased its work, and lay idly in his lap, and the lad had listened with all his might, quite unconscious that he was hearing that which was not intended for his ears, until the sound of the men quarrelling roused him from his lethargy.

The bitter, demoniac tones of Tyler, as he taunted the unfortunate saddler, had goaded him into a frenzy beyond all power of self-command; and, rushing in at the precise moment when the blacksmith had struck his master, he had wound his long arms about the Mayor and flung him out of doors. That Elsie was a sinner he could not believe; the fault, if fault there were, lay

entirely with Crosby. The horror of what he had heard and seen had quickened his wits, and had enabled him for once to decide upon a course of action without hesitation. He must go and find Crosby ; that was his immediate duty.

“ Thank ’ee, Samson, thank ’ee,” gasped Steele, who had sunk exhausted into his elbow-chair, as Samson, having shot the bolts behind Tyler, turned and faced his master. “ ’Twas a kind deed ; I shanna’ forget it. Hast finished the saddle ? Then get ’ee to bed,” he added, without waiting for an answer. “ Thee mun be over to Warehampton Abbots wi’ it early on the morrow.”

“ Master,” asked Samson, in hoarse tones, “ be it all true ? ”

“ Be what all true ? ” returned Steele testily.

“ All they ghastly things that villain said.”

“ Aye, lad, they be all true ; dom the lot on ’em, I say ! Get ’ee to bed, lad ! ”

"I ha' none finished the saddle," objected Samson.

"Get 'ee to bed, I tell 'ee! Finish 'en i' the morning."

"Nay, I'll finish 'en to-night," replied Samson. "I wants to be away to-morrow."

"Aye?" exclaimed Steele. "What's that thou art sayin'?"

"I want a holiday."

"'Adzooks! and what dost thou want wi' a holiday? Hast not had a holiday this past fortnight, mumbudgeting about at one place and another? What dost want a holiday for?"

"I ha' got business I mun see to at once, like."

"Thou hast business! What business canst thou have?"

"I can't tell 'ee, master."

"Oh! an' thou canst na' tell me thy business, neither can I let 'ee go about 'en. Besides, I ha' been a good master to 'ee, and

I bean't a-goin' to say as I be again an hour or two; but 'tis not i' reason thou shouldst seek to be away for a day this time o' year."

"'Twould take me more than a day, master; the business I be goin on' be not i' Winterbourne."

"What business canst thou have, I'd like to know—a Winterbourne lad born and bred? Mayhap thy business be in London?" he added suspiciously.

"I can tell 'ee naught about it, master," replied the lad, with a shake of the head. "Only let me go," he added eagerly; "I'll work mornin' and night, afore hours and after hours, to make it up to 'ee. I'll stop twice—aye, four times—as long as I be away when I get out o' my time, so as thou shalt none suffer by it; only let me go, master, for the sake o' Heaven above us!"

"No," said the saddler, after a few moments' reflection, "I'll none let 'ee go;

an' it were for any good, thou wouldst be able to tell me what it were."

"For thy own sake, master, don't 'ee refuse me. Thou'llt be sorry an' thou dost."

"Heyday! art threatening me? Things be come to a pretty pass when I be threatened by my own apprentice. Hark 'ee, Thomas Samson, I'll have none o' your interfering with my concerns. Thou shalt none go, and there's an end on't."

"Nay, master, nay," pleaded Samson; "I mun go—indeed, indeed, I mun. Don't say me nay!"

"I tell 'ee thou shalt none go; an' thou dost, I'll put 'ee in the Bridewell!" And without another word the saddler went upstairs to bed.

Samson sat down to finish the saddle, and to revolve in his own mind the position of affairs. He knew enough of the saddler to be sure that if he went, his master would be as good as his word, and that if he were

sent to the Bridewell, in all probability it would follow that his indentures would be broken; and in that case he might bid farewell to his prospect of succeeding to his master's business. Well, there were other places besides Winterbourne in the world, and, if he might not become a saddler, it needed no apprenticeship to be a shepherd or to work on the land.

Samson could not disguise from himself that to him the issue involved was of the gravest import. It meant the giving up of all his hopes in life—the flinging away the means of an honourable competency for a life of disappointment and uncertainty, passed amidst the degrading associations of unskilled labour. Yet, though he saw all this clearly, he felt that it was not sufficient to absolve him from what he realized to be his duty. At all hazards he must go and find Crosby, and persuade him—how he knew not—to return and marry Elsie. He

hated and despised the man who had betrayed and deserted the girl for whom he, Samson, would gladly have died; he loathed the seducer with bitter loathing; yet his duty left him no other course than to do the best possible for Elsie, and he must go. But how? Where should he seek him? In London? Perhaps. He had heard Arthur spoken of as a "town chap" and a "London gentleman." Yes, he must try London.

Then there came a more difficult question, upon which he pondered long and anxiously, rubbing his head as if to help his thoughts the while. Presently he stole upstairs to his garret, and, going to his chest, took out the old sock which served him as a bank. He looked ruefully at the scanty store of copper and silver coins which it contained. There was no help for it; Mattie had been laying by, he knew, for years past, in view of that long-deferred

event, her marriage. He must awaken her, and take her into his counsels. If she refused to aid him, then he must walk to London, and, if needs be, beg his way. So he tapped softly at Mattie's door.

"Who be there?" inquired Mattie.

"Me—Samson—come down to the kitchen! I mun speak to 'ee quiet; the master must none hear.'

"Od rabbit 'en, get 'ee gone. I'll come now-b'whiles."

So Samson went down again, and occupied the interim in making a small bundle of things he must needs take, and that finished, in soaking his strongest pair of shoes in the grease used in working the leather.

At length Mattie made her appearance.

"Good lawk-a'-mercy, Samson, what be the matter that thou mun needs wake one up like this'en? What be the meanin' of this bundle? What be 'ee about, lad?"

"Hush, Mattie! I be goin' away."

"Lawks, to hear thee tell 'en. Where art goin'."

"I dunno. To Lunnon, I suppose."

"Goin' to Lunnon, lad; what dost want there?"

"Speak low, Mattie, the master mustna' hear. He wonner gie me leave, so I be goin' wi'out. Mattie, be it all true about Miss Elsie?"

"Aye, lad," returned the handmaid sadly. "I fear me it be. He turned she out, and will not let us speak on't."

"An' the missis?" asked Samson.

"Poor heart, she be lyin' on the mat outside Elsie's door, asleep. The maister has a-locked it, and will not let her go in, it's that hard he is. Oh! Samson, lad, we be all good till we be found out," added Mattie with more sympathy than sense.

"Thou art a true friend to the poor lass, Mattie. I be goin' up to Lunnon to find that Crosby."

"Nay, nay, lad, leave' en wi' his Maker ;
breakin' 'ens bones won't mend matters ;
best let 'en bide."

"I shall break no bones," said Samson.
"I be goin' to bring 'en down to marry Miss
Elsie."

"Thou," laughed Mattie; "he'll none come
for 'ee, lad."

"Won't he?" said Samson, "them as lives
longest sees most,"

"Go thy ways, lad, them as walks Chessel
gets to the end on't."

"True, wench, true, but whether thou be
right or wrong I mun go. Thou seest,
Mattie, 'tain't justly as I wants to go, nor
rightly as I don't want to go in a manner o'
puttin' 'en, but that I *mun* go. 'Tain't as I knows
where to go, nor how to go, nor aught about
'en, but I mun *go* Likely thou think'st I
be a fool ; likely I be. 'Tain't no odds. 'Tis
in me to go, like it be i' the swallows i' the
fall o' the year."

“ Well, go, lad, an’ God be with ’ee. But what hast called me up for ? ”

“ Well,” began Samson, with evident shame of face, “ ’tis like this en; the master won’t hear o’ givin’ me a holiday.”

“ I be sure on’t, an’ he knows thy errand.”

“ Aye, I knowed that, so I didn’t tell ’en. Don’t ’ee, Mattie.”

“ Let ’en know ? not I ; the less I ha’ to do with a Pharaoh like that the better I be pleased.”

“ An’, Mattie, if there be aught to tell I’ll write to ’ee, an’——”

“ Write to me ! That will do no good ; oh ! yes, ’twill though, Hetty Tyler will read it for me. Aye, Samson, but she be good and true ; her goes over to Hockley most every day, and then her comes and tells me, an’ I tells the missis. Her’ll read it for me.”

“ Aye, that will do,” said Samson ; “ her’s a good lass, God bless her ! ”

“ Well, lad, be there aught else as thou wants me to do ? ”

“ N—o, unless——”

“ Well, what ? ”

“ Well, Mattie, I’ll have to walk to Lunnon, that be the long and short on’t, unless thou canst lend me a bit o’ money. I don’t like askin’ ’ee, ’cause I don’t rightly know when I can pay ’ee back ; ’twill not be till I be a journeyman, I fear me, an’ I know that thou’st been saving against thou goest to church with John.”

“ Aye, lad, ’tis true ; but an’ I went to church wi’ John in my smock thou shouldst have the money. How much dost want, lad ? I’ll fetch ’en.”

“ But, then, John——” began Samson, doubtfully.

“ John ’ud gie it her wi’ as free a heart as I does. Bide thee still while I get ’en.” And Mattie, with elaborate caution, raised one of the tiles of the hearth, and produced her slender stock of guineas. “ Take what thou wilt, lad.”

“Well,” commenced Samson, “if it bean’t too much, I’ll take——”

“Take enough, lad, only don’t ’ee tell me what. Lord, it may be weak o’ me, but the money do pull. I ha’ saved it tester by tester towards making a home—but there, take ’en, lad, take ’en; take it all an’ thou wants it,” said the girl quickly. “An’ may the Lord gi’e thee travelling mercies and prosperity i’ thy errand.”

And then, as if to distract her thoughts from the money, which, from the object which she had had in saving it, had acquired a certain sacredness in her eyes, the girl added, “The sooner thou art gone the better, Samson; thou mun get as far from this as ’ee may before mornin’ for the master ’ull set the ‘hue and cry’ on ’ee, I be thinkin’. I’ll cut ’ee some victuals and draw ’ee a drink o’ cider afore ’ee goes.”

“Nay,” said Samson, “I’ll neither eat nor drink o’ his’n, if I goes away wi’out the

master's leave I'll take none o' his food wi' me."

"Well, Samson lad, get 'ee gone then, and God bless 'ee. Don't 'ee fear, I'll do the best I can for the lass whiles thou art away."

Then she closed the door softly upon the apprentice, and, extinguishing the light, watched his retreating figure as he took his way down the silent, moonlit street. "'Tis a fool's errand, I be thinkin'," she said to herself; "but he be no fool as has gone on't. When the hand o' the Lord be upon a man it's the wise 'un goes and the fool as stops at home. I be glad I didna let 'en. 'Tain't by might nor by power ' as the Lord works, nor by the wisdom o' men for that matter. Mayhap He's chosen Samson; he be a' odd 'un to choose for certain, but there ain't no tellin'."

CHAPTER III.

SAMSON TAKES A JOURNEY.

IT was with a heavy heart that Samson strode through the streets of the little town, never pausing to look back. Even the houses he passed seemed ghostly and unfamiliar ; he felt dazed and numb ; he could not think ; the only idea that his mind could retain was that he must go on. Almost inadvertently he turned into the Hockley Road, and, slouching his body forward, commenced the long ascent over the downs. Samson walked as rapidly as he could, and, half-way up the hill, paused for a minute at the entrance of the lane which led to the farmhouse. Looking back on the town

lying below him, bathed in the clear moonlight; the Minster towers dominated it, and between them he might have distinguished the high-peaked roof of the saddler's house; but he saw them as in a dream meaning nothing, and it was only when he had gone many miles further that he remembered that he had turned and looked at them.

Yes, he must get on. The road led to Salisbury; but in a flash came back to him Mattie's warning about the "hue and cry." The high road would be nearer, it was true, but he dare not take it; the risk was too great. He must skirt the frequented way, threading sequestered lane and creeping along hedgerow until he had passed, at least, the boundaries of the hundred. So he turned down the lane, and it was with a feeling of almost surprise when, looking up, he recognized Rose's farmhouse.

This was where Elsie was lying sick and ill—Elsie, the girl he loved, the girl for

whom he was perilling all his hopes in life ; for whom he was courting disgrace and ostracism ; for whom he was risking even now the possibility of being hunted like a common felon.

There was a light glinting from one of the dormer windows. Was that the room, he wondered, where the girl was lying, sick in mind and body, or was it only the moonrays refracted from the uneven quarries ? For a few moments he leant over the gate and looked at the farmhouse, his heart full of the girl it sheltered. Then he opened the gate, and followed the walk by the garden hedge, glancing up from time to time until he had seen every whit, not knowing on which side her room lay, but finding a negative comfort in the knowledge that he must at least have seen it. Then he went on up the steep downside, walking blindly, till very weariness made him pause on the top of the hill, when he sat down to rest, his face towards Winterbourne.

The moon had sunk in the west, and o'er the eastern hills came the first faint rays of the morning light. Far away in the valley he fancied he could trace Winterbourne lying amidst its encircling meadows, and, nearer, the chimneys of Hockley Farm. As he looked, the whole vision of the farmhouse rose before him so clearly that, long years after, when he was a greybeard, he would tell how wonderful his eyesight had been in his youth, when, from five miles beyond it, he could distinguish not merely the outline, but the very doors and windows of the farm.

The morning light brought with it recollection, and with the mists of the night went the film from the eyes of his mind.

He was going to London, in itself an awful undertaking to a lad who had never been beyond twenty miles from his native place. What he must do there, or how he should get there, he must think. In his

mind there rose the strange conceit that he was like unto Christian, in Master Bunyan's book, leaving the City of Destruction behind, and pressing forward by unknown paths to an unknown country.

Like the other pilgrim, his progress was endangered by uncounted snares and sore besetments. The "hue and cry" might be upon him at any moment after the sun had risen over the town which lay at his feet.

He must avoid even the villages, and trust to the kindheartedness of Wessex folk for a crust of bread or a drink of milk, and leave to sleep, for the night or two which must elapse before he could hope to reach Salisbury, on a bundle of straw in an out-house.

After he had rested for a while, he got up and pursued his journey. He was hungry, cold, and tired, and he had no hope of rest or food for many a mile to come.

Around him lay small hamlets and outlying farms, where the work of life had already begun for the day ; but to none of them dared he go, lest he might be recognized. So he plodded on, avoiding even the shepherds in the fields and the labourers slouching to their work, lest, later in the day, when they should have heard of his misdoing, they might be instrumental in directing, in pursuance of their duty as lealfolk of the sheriff, those who were bent on seizing him.

Samson was walking through some of the most beautiful country in the West of England, but to him, in his then mood, it was simply so much distance to be covered ; its hills were merely so many exhausting climbs ; the many flashing rivers only places where he must take off his boots and wade through ice-cold water ; the hedgerows, here gleaming white with frost, and there scarlet with ripened hawthorn-berries, were only

so many weary miles of fences to be passed; even the trees, in their scanty mantles of purple and russet and gold, nothing more than so many posts, each set to mark a welcome step on his journey.

It was high noon before he had gained a farmhouse where he thought he might prudently rest.

“Will ’ee gie me a drink of milk, missus, an’ let ’en sit down by thy fire for a bit?” he begged of the good wife, who was scouring out a milkpan by the open door.

“Let thee rest, aye?”

“I can pay for it, missus,” said Samson.

“I dare to say thou canst. How be I to know as thou hast come by the money honestly? Thou art a runaway ’prentice belike, and hast all thy master’s till about thee. Thou art welcome to a bite and sup, for that matter, but I’ll have none of thee in my house; the laws again harbouring vagabonds be too strict; and the constable,

honest man, is allus lurking about for such as thou. Get thee gone, lad, and if thou art a wise 'un, thou wilt be out of the parish as soon as maybe."

"Thank 'ee, missus," said Samson, humbly, as he took his departure.

This added a new terror to Samson's journey. He had heard strange tales of the curious people who lived out of the hundred, and at the words of the woman these recurred with disconcerting vividness. It was customary in Winterbourne to term the inhabitants of other shires 'foreigners' and to look upon them with suspicion; they were, too, people to be overreached and cozened. The racial feeling was particularly strong at this period. Men were everywhere educated to look with distrust and suspicion upon persons not of the same county with themselves, and Samson had no doubt that he would be regarded as fair play by all he met. If a Wessex woman treated him thus, what

might he not expect at the hands of the dwellers beyond the borders of his hereditary kinsmen—lands which he firmly believed to be peopled with murderers, footpads, highway robbers and gipsies?—he would be a lamb in the midst of wolves! Nevertheless, be the risks what they might, he had no choice but to go forward.

Hunger at length forced him to turn his steps to a little hamlet, and here, somewhat to his surprise, he was allowed “to take his ease at his inn;” the host only taking the reasonable precaution of obtaining payment for everything before hand, and contenting himself with those vaguely general questions in which the inhabitants of Wessex delight.

Samson found that he had wandered several miles from his road; so after a few hours’ sleep, it being sunset, he resumed his journey towards Salisbury.

Once beyond the border of the county, he boldly took the highway in the hope of

getting a lift from some passing wain, and ploughed stolidly through the mud, for it had rained whilst he had been sleeping, feeling that each milestone he passed was a familiar friend, whose mossy face he might never see again.

He was by this time walking through a bleak and desolate country, with neither hedge nor tree on either hand ; no houses to pass as helpful landmarks, only the mournful sounds of the souging wind, the distant bleating of sheep, or the croaking of night birds broke the lonesome silence. The road was a mere track without characteristic of any sort to break the dead monotony. He only climbed to the top of one hillock to see stretching before him a declivity, and then in the distance another hillock rising, precisely like the last, with only the suggestion of weary miles beyond it of dreary sameness. Overhead the clouds careered low down to the earth like affrighted crowds of

wantons hurried through the darkness to judgment, and stinging showers descended at intervals each shorter than the last, which presently settled down to fierce driving rain, and still the solitary figure struggled on until it reached a barn dismantled and ruined and long since deserted save by an owl or two which had made their homes among the wrecked rafters of the roof, and occasionally by a few fouler birds of the night, such as poachers, sheep-stealers, and vagrants generally, who found its proximity to the road and remoteness from human ken useful for purposes of business. Into its eerie shelter Samson crept, and curling himself upon a heap of ill-smelling, half-rotted leaves, he slept heavily until far into the following day.

Before leaving the inn the lad had taken the precaution of filling his wallet with bread and cheese, and to purchase a stone bottle containing some couple of quarts of cider, which, according to the fashion of the

parts, he carried slung upon his back. Upon these viands he made a sufficient meal, and then tried to arrange in his mind some definite plan of action. But the harder he tried the more impossible he found it to think ; the vision of Elsie, with her pretty face all white and pinched with sorrow and pain, would obtrude itself upon his every attempt at reflection, until he gave up in despair, telling himself that it was useless at present ; he would be able to think clearly when once he had gained the roof of the Salisbury coach, but not before.

So he pushed on across Salisbury Plain until he came to the level plateau on which stands the sequestered village of Be-merton.

Samson, like every one else in those days, knew, at least by repute, about the beautiful life of its saintly vicar, a hundred years since laid to rest ; but so engrossed was he in his own troubles, that although he heard the

name of the village mentioned in its ale-house, it fell upon his ear without conveying any impression to his intelligence. He passed the tiny church, so ancient and picturesque, and the bare stone parsonage, oblivious that the man, whose mystic poetry he had read in the chained volume which stood in the Minster library at Winterbourne, and whom he had been taught, in a vague way, to feel that it would have been an honour to see, had years before walked that very road almost daily. Here, by following a misdirection, he made a circuitous detour, and at length reached Wilton, that prettiest and most ancient of Wiltshire villages. Passing its stately park and gorgeous manor-house without a glance, he went on until he saw reflected in the mere the awful spire of Salisbury Cathedral.

But to Samson the placid lake was simply a place in which he might free himself from the stains of travel, and, this done, an

obstruction which caused him a delay which he begrudged.

By good rights the lad ought to have been impressed by the stateliness of the mediæval city which he entered. According to all the recognized canons of antiquarianism he should have been awestruck by the grandeur of its buildings and the magnificent proportion of its broad and noble street; he should have gazed with reverential wonder at the wealth of curious wares within its shop-windows of many panes; but all the wealth of wonder was wasted on the lad; all he cared for was to find out the time at which the coach took its departure for London, and he experienced a feeling of dreary disgust on discovering that he had some five hours and a half to wait, which he must kill as best he might by wandering aimlessly through the town, seeing all and observing nothing, save and except the market cross, which struck him

as admirably adapted for the weighing of butter.

At a small inn, the exterior of which promised cheapness, Samson obtained a frugal meal; of course the landlady overwhelmed him with a multitude of questions as to who he was, whence he came, whither he was going, and why he went. In answering, Samson inadvertently mentioned the name of Arthur Crosby, and hereupon the landlady's face assumed an expression of mysterious interest.

Now cathedral cities, being centres where those upholders of divine right, the clergy, do greatly congregate, they were in those days also centres of Jacobite plotting, and the inn Samson had chosen was the meeting-place of a number of the well-wishers to the king over the water. The father of our hero had, therefore, as one of the active agents in the West country, been well known to the landlady, which accounted for her in-

terest, and offers some excuse for her supposition that her customer was also a worker in the "good cause," possibly even an accredited messenger selected because of his simple ways and moral aspect.

"You come from Winterbourne, so I suppose it is Dr. Crosby's son you mean. The old doctor is dead, as I've heard?"

"'Tis true, missus, he wor killed by a stone from the church a fallin' on him; 'twas thrown down by the witches, 'tis said. Did'st know him?"

"Aye, he wor one on my best customers. Killed by a stone, wor he now? Good Lord, what perils there be about land and sea to be sure. An' where be his son, at Court?"

"I don't know, dame; he may be. I be goin' up to Lunnnon to seek 'en. Can'st tell me aught about 'en, 'twill be welcome hearing?"

"What colour be moles, lad?" asked the woman sharply.

“Moles, missis? Why, some be blackish, and some be more brownish, but most is a kind o’ grey,” replied Samson, considerably puzzled.

“Thou’st no good; I ha’ been deceived in thee, I fear me. Dost want to harm him?”

“Nay, nay, the Lord forbid as I should harm any o’ His creatures. ’Tis for ’ens own good I want to find ’en. Harm ’en, woman? nay, I’d shield ’en wi’ my own body.”

Without another word the woman drew and set before him a tankard of ale and a horn of water. “Drink good health to the King,” she said.

“Aye, that will I wi’ pleasure,” and Samson raised the liquor to his lips without further ceremony.

“I much fear me thou art no good; thou dost not know how to drink a toast as yet. But—well, thou seemest a honest lad—

hark 'ee, be that the horn o' the coach! Be off with 'ee, and if thou meanest no harm to Master Crosby, just inquire o' the priests."

"Priests, missis," began Samson, stupidly.

"Lord ha' mercy on thee for a doited idiot; 'tis ill wasting words on such a loon as thou; get thee gone!"

Samson was too diffident to resent the woman's words; indeed, he was not at all sure they were undeserved, so he made the best of his way to the coach, and, mounting it, was soon on his way towards London.

True to his overnight intention, Samson set himself honestly to think how best he might find Crosby. When he left Winterbourne he entertained a dim idea that all he would have to do on reaching London would be to ask the first passer-by where Master Crosby lived, and be told, as a matter of course, just as in Winterbourne he would himself have been able to direct an inquirer to the home of any inhabitant in the town.

But the comparative vastness of Salisbury had filled him with a misgiving that it was just possible there might be a town so large as that each inhabitant should not know every other even by name.

Then his mind recurred to the woman's injunction that he should ask the priests. But what priests, and how should he find them? He had often heard in church of priests in conjunction with Levites, but had never heard the term applied to the clergy of the Romish Church, who were always spoken of by Wessex folk as "Jesuits," and Samson was considerably puzzled as to what "priests" —all of whom he had supposed to be dead long since — could have to do with Arthur Crosby, whom he had never looked upon as particularly afflicted with religion, although, like nearly every other person in those days, he went to church with scrupulous regularity, and, had he been a Jew, Samson reasoned, he would scarcely have done that.

Still, the woman had told him to inquire of the priests, and if he could not discover Crosby he could at least endeavour to find them.

Then the keen air, the tankard of ale which the woman at the inn gave him, the jolting of the coach, which, as he was wedged between a portly bagman on his left and a burly grazier on his right, acted upon him like the rocking of a cradle ; all these, together with the weariness which supervenes upon novel experiences, brought on a condition of drowsiness which, whilst not restful, was a splendid mood for waking nightmares. The trees suddenly jerked themselves into human forms, and back again at every jolt of the coach, with sundry other fearful feats of magic, until all the objects of the landscape entering into the conspiracy became jumbled together in the inextricable mazes of a wild dervish dance, in which all the people he knew took prominent part, and upon their absurd

vagaries he gazed without interest or surprise.

Suddenly he became aware that the coach had stopped, and that the other passengers were getting down. Mechanically he did the same, and was conscious of a mild surprise as he found himself on his feet in the road. Then he saw that it was evening, and they were changing horses, and reproached himself as he remembered that he had not yet decided what he should say to Arthur when he met him.

The potman of the inn came, asking him what refreshment he would please to take, and it was not until the coach was miles away that he recollected that he had neither drank nor paid for anything.

After settling himself again, and murmuring an inarticulate reply to some question propounded by the bagman on his left, and resolving in his mind that now he really would decide upon the course of action he

would take on his arrival in London, he promptly nodded into oblivion, where he remained with enviable pertinacity, as his fellow-travellers thought, until the coach stopped for the night.

As the rest all got down, and were securing beds, he followed suit, but the sum asked seemed to his Winterbourne imagination, so disproportionate that he was glad to agree for a third of the sum required to catch what rest he could on a settle in the coffee-room.

The lad was too worn out to sleep, and all through the night what he should say to Crosby whirled as a phantasmagoria of words through his brain. Who was he that Crosby should listen to him? In the dark stillness of the night he realized upon what a Quixotic errand he had started; the chances of success seemed nothing as compared with the almost certainty of failure. He could not but see clearly that his wisest course would be to go

back to Winterbourne and give himself up to justice.

But in the early morning the voice of duty made itself heard once more, urging him on, and with the returning light came the renewal of hope.

Yes, he had no choice but to go forward, and, this point once settled, Samson found the second day on the coach pass more quickly, for he was able to take an interest in every object on the road. The time-worn churches, each in its quiet God's-acre ; the little villages, each so like, yet so distinct in its individuality ; the varying nature of the country through which they passed ; the groups of children who stood under the hedges or at the cottage doors and cheered them on their way ; even the very pigs that ran squeaking from under the horses' feet, and then immediately settled down to the gravity of feeding as though they had never been disturbed ; all attracted his attention by the

air of familiarity which they wore, until he found it difficult to realize that he was a stranger in a strange land.

Presently, as evening fell, they came upon endless rows of houses, and Samson observed that his fellow-travellers suddenly became alert ; their listlessness had departed, and each was busily scanning the street as if in search of some one he knew.

“What great town be this ?” he asked of his neighbour the grazier.

“London, you fool !” answered that worthy laconically.

A little more jolting, then the streets became narrower ; a short steep hill was ascended, and the coach rolled over a bridge which spanned what Samson instinctively knew must be the Thames.

This, then, was London. Yon great dark mass must be St. Paul’s, and before he could realize that he had reached the end of his journey the coach had passed under a low archway into a galleried inn-yard.

CHAPTER IV.

A CHAPTER OF ACCIDENTS.

"AIN'T you going to get down?" said a spry young ostler to Samson, who, with mouth and eyes agape, kept his seat on the coach-top.

"Aye, I be goin' to get down. Where be I?"

"In the yard of the 'Bull and Mouth.' Perhaps you thought you were at the Hummums, or at the White Horse Cellar?"

"Nay," said Samson; "I bean't any such a fool as that; I can e'en see for mysen' that it ain't a cellar."

At this point in the conversation the guard came up. Now that functionary had

conceived a sort of contemptuous liking for his passenger, whose unmistakable verdancy had been an inexhaustible fund of amusement to him on the upward journey.

“Well, my fine yokel, you’re in London at last, and what may you be going to do with yourself now?”

“I want to find Mr. Crosby.”

“Where does he live?” queried the guard.

“In Lunnon,” said Samson; “his Christen name’s Arthur. Don’t you know ’en?”

“Of course,” put in the ostler. “Third turning to the right, second on the left when you get out o’ the inn-yard. Crosby Hall, in Bishopsgate Street, it’s called. Any body will tell you where it is.”

“Thank you,” rejoined Samson, overjoyed at the success of his first effort. “I wonder if it’ll be too late to go to-night; folks would all be abed in Winterbourne,

but I have heard tell as they do keep mighty late hours i' Lunnon."

"Let him alone," said the guard. "Can't you see that he's nothing but a country bumpkin? He's as raw as a bullock's heart at an *à-la-mode* house. Look here, young man," he added, turning to Samson, "don't take all for gospel that you're told in London. You get to bed, and inquire at the post office in the morning."

Samson thanked the man, and, seeing no other way out of it, asked if he could be accommodated with a bed. About this no difficulty was made, but the charge horrified him. Six nights at the inn, and he would not have sufficient money to find him food, much less to carry him back to Winterbourne.

"I can't stop here," he said to the guard when he got outside. "'Twould be clear ruin."

"I guessed you were none too well off.

Just wait a bit, and I'll show you where you can get a cheap lodging. I suppose you ain't over particular?"

"Lord bless 'ee, no! I'm not a nice particular man. I never minds clean dirt so long as I know what it is."

"Take my advice, and don't ask too many questions in London," laughed the guard. "Wait where you are till I'm ready, and keep your mouth shut."

Samson thought it was very kind of the guard thus to advise him. The air was thick and the place was smoky, it was true, so he manfully set himself to the embarrassing task of keeping his lips closed, until he almost choked.

"Look here, young fellow," remarked the coachman, coming up to him, "gentlemen always gives me something for driving them."

"Do they?" said Samson.

"Yes, they does, and never less than half-a-crown."

The lad's hand made no move towards his pocket as he calmly replied, "Seems very kind on 'em, in a manner of speaking." That the man could mean that he expected a fee from him never for a moment entered into his head; he was not a "gentleman," and he could not but think the coachman unreasonably abusive when he presently went out of the yard cursing him for a born fool.

In a few moments the guard was ready. The apprentice followed him through a bewildering number of narrow lanes, in which, to his surprise, many shops and inns were still open, though it was now almost eight o'clock. The streets, too, were lined with people, and he wondered what great event could have brought such crowds together. Once he even suggested to the guard that they had better stand in a doorway until the people should have done going by; and that gentleman not appear-

ing to understand what he meant, he inquired what was going on.

“Nothing as I knows on; maybe a fire or something at the other end of the town. The streets do seem powerful quiet.”

Samson could make nothing of this reply, so relapsed into silence, which was maintained until they reached a particularly dingy-looking street, down which the guard told him to turn, directing him to knock at the door over which hung a big black kettle, where, if he mentioned who had sent him, he would be accommodated with a lodging, and thereupon bade him “Good-night,” adding the advice that if he were Samson he would put his money into the toes of his boots, and keep those articles on during the night.

The house was, if possible, a degree more frowsy than any other he had seen; and when the door opened, such a whiff of sickening stench met him as almost deprived him of the power of speech.

A woman, as dirty and uninviting as her house, thrust her head and half a slatternly body through the aperture. "What do you want?"

"I wants a bed for the night, missus, an' it bean't too late."

"A bed? For thyself?"

"Aye."

"Alone, dost thou mean?"

"Yes, missus," said Samson; "I allus ha' slept alone, but if it 'ud come cheaper, I don't mind sharing a bed wi' another so long as they be clean."

"What in the name of goodness brought you to this house, you booby?"

"I weren't brought, so to put it," returned Samson, with strict regard to accuracy. "The man as blows the horn o' the coach as comes from Salisbury he told me to come here."

"I wish he'd send his yokels somewhere else; but there, come in, lad; I'll make shift

to find you a quiet corner somewhere. The man was a good friend to me once, and I couldn't turn even a bigger fool than yourself away if he sent him."

Samson followed the woman up many flights of stairs to a little garret chamber, which, if not cleaner than the rest of the house, was certainly less evil-smelling, thanks to a superabundance of ventilation. It was an ill-furnished little den, but the lad was not accustomed to luxuries nor disposed to be fastidious; so, after disposing of some food which the woman brought him, and placing his money in his boots, he flung himself upon the truckle-bed, too weary to go through the ceremony of undressing, and fell heavily asleep.

Towards morning, just when the darkness was most intense, Samson was awakened by mingled sounds of blows, screams, and oaths. Seizing his bundle and rushing from the room, he gained the landing below, where

he was rudely hustled against the wall by a woman who was scuttling headlong from an apartment towards the head of the staircase. He noticed that she held in her hands a watch with seals and a chain, and that she was in a state of semi-nudity. She was screaming at the top of her voice, and following her staggered a man, whom he perceived was bleeding from a wound in the chest.

At once it rushed upon him what sort of house he had got into. The streets were preferable to this, he thought; better to sit on a doorstep for the rest of the night, or lean against some sheltered corner, than to stop in such a den of thieves and murderers. So he quietly followed the woman out of doors, and, on gaining the street, was surprised to see no trace of her.

As he walked up the lane he could see no one, yet ever and again he found himself pulled by the sleeve by something that

looked like a mere sodden bundle of rags, which importuned him for alms, and then as suddenly shrank back into the impenetrable obscurity.

When he reached the broad street which ran at the top of the lane, he met a watchman, who in a strident voice was entreating the people to sleep. To him Samson repeated what had occurred in the house he had just left, and was intensely astonished when the man treated it as an every-day matter not worth his troubling about.

As the man, although rough, was not uncivil, Samson, for the mere sake of companionship, clung to him and obtained a mass of information respecting London and its life, which opened his eyes not a little. Doubtless he could have become even more learned in metropolitan wiles only for the watchman suddenly uttering an unearthly yell and fleeing as if for his life, leaving Samson in stupid sur-

prise rooted like a stock to the middle of the road.

The oil lamps which were hung outside every few houses had been extinguished long since, but that the householders had done their duty in hanging them out was evidenced by the noise of the smashing of glass.

This sound would have warned any un-armed Londoner to have followed the example of the watchman, who evidently knew which was the better part of valour, yet to Samson it was as unintelligible as startling. Peer into the darkness as he might he could distinguish nothing ; but suddenly on every hand he was surrounded by a yelling crowd of showily-dressed men, many of whom wore swords at their sides and were armed with bludgeons ; their looks were more drunken than sinister, and as they swarmed about him he was at a loss to determine whether to be amused or frightened. He

was not, however, destined to be left long in suspense, for several of the foremost of the crowd seized him, and before he was aware had stuffed him by main force into a tub which was produced from some adjacent corner, where it had been secreted until such time as they should have succeeded in entrapping an unwary pedestrian.

Then the tub was turned on its side, and the crowd devoted their energies to kicking it over and over until it reached Snow Hill, when they considerably allowed it to roll and jolt and tumble with accelerating impetus to the foot of the declivity, where, meeting with a post, it saved Samson the trouble of extricating himself by shooting him headforemost into the road.

It may honestly be affirmed that Samson was never so surprised in his life ; the rolling and twirling he had received made him feel and act like a drunken man, and when he was arrested by two ancient Charlies for

the crime, of disturbing the King's peace, and, furthermore, damaging a post, the property of the worshipful corporation of the city of London, he could offer neither explanation nor resistance, so allowed himself to be quietly marched off to the nearest round-house.

"Well," muttered Samson to himself, as he heard the key turn on him, "if this be Lunnon ways, the sooner I be out on't the better content I'll be ; I ha' often heard tell that Lunnon be a mighty gay city, but its gaieties bean't to my mind. Now, I do wonder what i' the world I'll get done to for being made the butt o' other people's jokes. The Lord gi'e me a happy deliverance ! but I do feel as if every bone o' my body had been pounded in a mortar."

Next morning his astonishment at London ways was not lessened by the fact that, although his explanations were considered satisfactory and his wrongs received deep

sympathy, he was, nevertheless, required to pay the gaoler several shillings as fees before he was allowed to go about his business.

“Truly,” said Samson, as he turned his back upon the round-house and looked ruefully at his sadly minished store of money, “the only true things as I ha’ heard about Lunnon be that it be a mighty wicked and a mighty costly place. Dear Lord, how sore I be, for sure! But I mun find that Crosby to-day.”

The first thing Samson did was to take the guard’s advice and go to the post-office, where, after much badgering and sending from pillar to post, he was informed that a merchant named Crosby resided on Tower Hill. Thither he wended his way, only to find himself at the end of his journey no nearer to the accomplishment of his task, although his knowledge of London had been considerably enlarged. Evidently, Samson thought, the only thing to be done was to adopt the simple, though somewhat lengthy,

method of asking at least one person in every street through which he passed whether they knew Arthur.

After repeating this query some dozens of times he found he had wandered to the turnpike in the Mile End Road. As going on in that direction seemed to promise nothing, he turned down a lane, and in the course of time arrived at the shaggy street then known as Ratcliffe Highway.

Here he found people enough to ask, largely foreigners, whom he could not understand; it is to be feared that he put down many sturdy English mariners in this category, they spoke a language so different from his own. He had, however, one little bit of good fortune in meeting a sailor who had more than once "lain by" in the harbour of Warehampton Canonicorum, with whom he had a pleasant chat and welcome drink, and who obliged him by selling him, at a marvellously low rate, a curious foreign dog,

which he bought with the intention of presenting to Elsie on his return, and a rare specimen of bird, known as "Canary," for Mattie, neither of which presents were destined to be delivered; for the dog having been trained to run away and rejoin the vendor at the earliest opportunity, it proceeded to act up to the standard of its education with all possible despatch. The bird he was able to retain somewhat longer—long enough, indeed, to put some water into its cage, when it promptly washed and basely revealed itself to Samson's wonder-struck gaze as a "common or garden" sparrow, whereupon he let it fly.

After leaving the sailor, his acquaintance with London life was further extended by witnessing sundry street fights, and coming into disagreeably close contact with a score or so of extremely drunken persons. He also obtained a much-enlarged vocabulary of profanity.

Then it occurred to him that the best houses of Winterbourne were for the most part on its outskirts, and that, therefore, his wisest course was to seek Arthur in some such locality. Accordingly, he tried the pleasant villages of Hackney, Tottenham and Islington, but all without success. So he determined once more to seek the centre, and following the road found himself at length in Smithfield Market.

At one of the many taverns with which that neighbourhood abounded he procured a meal, but the expenses of the day had so reduced his exchequer that he dared not afford himself the luxury of a bed. The night was fine and warm for the time of year, and he felt it would be no great hardship to pass the night on a stall in a booth as he saw others doing. He was fortunate enough to get one to himself, where he slept undisturbed till about four o'clock, then the market opened and he was compelled to

commence another weary day of fruitless search.

This passed comparatively uneventfully; of course he was cheated and cozened two or three times, but he was commencing to be careful and so was not seriously taken in.

At length, when the night was considerably advanced, he was returning, footsore and tired out, to Smithfield Market, in the hope of getting another cheap lodging, when he was overtaken by another gang of Mohocks, who, however, being much more drunk than the former lot, were disposed to be content by "tweaking" him, and other such mild amusements.

Samson was lucky enough to prevent them doing him any serious harm, and to obtain a sufficient hearing to be able to ask where Arthur lived. One gentleman was kind enough to direct him to a house in Kensington, where he arrived towards morning, only to find—after knocking up

several night porters, and routing out various snoozing Charlies, who cursed and hounded him—that Crosby was not known; and he had to take his weary way back to the market.

This he did to the best of his ability ; but it was five o'clock ere he arrived at a little street of quiet, well-to-do-looking houses, down which he wandered, only to find that it was a *cul-de-sac*. Even Sampson's spirit gave way under this trifling annoyance ; so, sitting down on a doorstep to rest and recover himself, he dozed off and slept for two or three hours, until he was awakened by the opening of the door against which he was leaning.

Samson staggered to his feet with a stammered apology to a man of quiet demeanour, who was standing in the doorway with a broom in his hand.

" I did na' mean no harm," began the lad ;
" I wor only resting a bit."

" You were doing no harm," the man

replied, "It is not a fitting place for purposes of rest. If you are tired, you are quite welcome to come inside."

"I should like to come in, master," said Samson, "but what be I to pay?"

"Nothing, my son; there is nothing to pay for our poor hospitality."

"Nothing, master?" ejaculated the apprentice, now thoroughly awake. "But this be Lunnon, bean't 'en?"

Samson was easily persuaded to follow his companion down a long, dimly-lighted passage into a little room, plainly but comfortably furnished, and which contained—what was to the lad a novelty—a sea-coal fire, burning in an iron grate.

"You may rest here as long as you choose," said his guide. "Have you broken your fast?"

"Eh! done what?"

"Have you had anything to eat this morning?"

“Well, I ha’ had a stay-stomach, so to put ’en. ’Twere a hunch o’ bread; but, Lord! one gets nought to speak on for a ha’porth i’ this place. Thou see’st, maister, ’tis like this ’un. When I ha’ done what I ha’ come for, I mun get back again, so I must e’en be careful wi’ my money.”

, Without a word his range friend left him, shortly to return bearing a small salver, upon which was an ample basin of steaming porridge, a jug of milk, and a plentiful supply of coarse bread.

“We are, like yourself, poor,” he said to Samson, as he set the salver before him. “I cannot offer you either wine or meat, but such as we have you are welcome to. Rest as long as you choose, and go when you list.” And, quietly raising two fingers of his right hand above the lad’s head, he stood for a moment motionless, then silently left the room.

Samson congratulated himself upon hav-

ing at length fallen into good quarters, though he had considerable difficulty in persuading himself that he was not dreaming. After all, Londoners were not entirely bad—a conclusion at which he had been arriving during the past two days. The meal might, as his friend had intimated, be plain, but the porridge was superlative of its kind, and Samson ate it with an enjoyment born of four days' semi-starvation.

Then he stretched himself at full length before the fire and slept. Suddenly he awoke, with a sense that he had been called and an apprehension that he had slumbered long. As a matter of fact, he had only lost consciousness for a very few minutes. Gradually he remembered where he was, and his mission. Reproaching himself for his loss of time, he regained his feet, and turned to seek his mysterious friend. He looked up and down the passage without seeing him; then, fancying he

heard his voice, went in the direction of the sound until he found himself at the head of a short flight of steps, down which a voice was clearly audible.

He descended, and knocked at a door. Receiving no response, he opened it, when he found himself in a low-roofed chapel, at the farther end of which he beheld a spectacle that thrilled him with timorous amazement. The lights which were burning on the altar, and the air heavy with incense, told the lad that he was in one of those horrible sinks of iniquity, a popish conventicle; and his hospitable friend he recognized in the person of the priest who was celebrating. But his horror succumbed to his sense of wonder that these dangerous people, whom he had been taught to regard as idolaters and children of wrath, should have been the first since his arrival in London to show him kindness.

This filled him with such perplexity that

he sat down to watch the proceedings, which presently absorbed his whole interest. The only congregation he could discover consisted of some five or six men, one of whom, when the service was over, came up and asked him in a low voice how he got there, and if he were a Catholic.

Samson replied, "I came in search o' he wi' all they strange clothes on; he's been good to me, he has, an' I came to thank 'en."

During this brief colloquy his whilom friend, having divested himself of his robes, joined them, and, beckoning Samson to follow, led the way back to the room into which he had first introduced the lad; then, turning to the other, he explained:

"I found this lad, father, resting on the doorstep, so I brought him in and gave him some food."

"You did well, my son." Then, turning to Samson, he continued, "You are evidently not a Catholic?"

"I suppose not," assented Samson, dubiously. Had the other asked him if he were a papist he would have understood.

"No, father," answered the inferior cleric; "he had no knowledge that this was a religious house, or that I was a priest."

"Be thou a priest?" almost yelled Samson, starting towards him so suddenly that the other instinctively drew back.

"Yes, I am a priest; and what then?"

"A woman told me to find out the priests, and they'd be able to tell me where he lives."

"Who is he?" quietly interrupted the superior.

"He? Why, Master Crosby, to be sure—Arthur Crosby. Where be he, masters? Tell me! tell me! for the love o' God!" implored Samson.

The priests glanced at one another; then the superior said: "Before we can give you any information you must tell us who you

are, and satisfy us as to your business with the gentleman you seek."

"Aye, that will I, my masters, wi' a thankful heart." And bit by bit, with many digressions, and overlaid with infinite prolixity, Samson told all the pitiful story. The pathos of his artlessness touched his hearers ; the priests listened without interrupting him, and when he had finished the superior said quietly, " My son, the mercy of Heaven has directed you to us ; we are able to give you the information you seek, but it must be on our own terms. For reasons I may not tell you, you must agree not to mention where, or how, or from whom you got the information. You promise ? "

"Aye, wi' my whole heart."

"And another condition," said the other priest, "is that you return and tell us how you have sped on your errand."

This Samson also promised.

Then they told the lad that Arthur

Crosby was now known to the world as the Earl of Grassthorpe, and that he lived scarce a mile away, in a place named Red Lion Square ; and further—so intimate did their knowledge of his lordship's habits appear—that he would have little chance of seeing him till very late at night. Then they gave the lad another meal, and, promising their prayers for his success, let him go.

CHAPTER V.

A MEDLEY OF EXPERIENCES.

WHEN Samson came out into the quiet street he turned to the left in search of the "Bull and Mouth" inn, purposing to write Mattie the great news. The fortunate accident by which he had discovered Arthur's residence had filled him with such an afflatus of hope as made him sanguine of his ultimate success.

He concluded that to put Mattie in touch with his movements was the first thing he must do, for no time should be lost in conveying the least word of comfort and hope to Elsie, and at the inn he would certainly learn the quickest way of doing this.

Here again fortune favoured him, for when he arrived at the old galleried yard he found that the coach by which he had come up to London, having been delayed on account of severe weather in the north, which had prevented the arrival of the post, was being washed preparatory to starting on its journey. And there, listlessly watching the operation, stood his old friend, the guard.

“Be goin’ to start soon, master?” asked Samson.

“Yes, when these plaguy mail-bags come. What, my yokel!” he added, as he recognized the apprentice, “are you coming back with us?”

“Nay,” said Samson, “I would I were. I ha’ had enough o’ this town. Coach or no coach, I shall na’ stop an hour longer in ’en when my work’s done, I can tell ’ee. Aye, master, don’t ’ee send any other body to yon rakehelly place. Such a night as I had on’t, for sure! Robbin’ and murderin’, and worse

goin' on afore my very eyes. To think such wickedness be in creation."

"Well," said the guard, laughing, "it hasn't done you much harm. You looks bright enough."

"Aye, I ha' had good news ; mayhap that's why I looks bright. I be goin' to write a letter about 'en. Thou'lt take 'en for me, I'll be bound ?"

"That will I, willingly ; give it us."

"It bean't written yet, I tell 'ee."

"Then write it, dottrel, and make haste ; dost think the coach is going to stop all day ? I tell you we shall be off before you know where you are."

"How be I to write 'en ?" asked Samson helplessly. "I ain't got ne'er a bit o' paper."

"The Lord have mercy on thee for a doited fool ! You'll never be hanged, you're not sharp enough. Here, come along, I'll see about it ; though why on earth I should

take all this trouble over such a booby, I don't know."

So saying, he led Samson into the inn, supplied him with a sheet of paper, lent him his own ink-horn, etc., then once more bidding him make haste, left him to compose his epistle.

The apprentice sat for some moments biting the end of his pen and staring vacantly out of the window, meanwhile stupidly wondering how he should begin. At length, feeling he durst not waste more time, he buckled manfully down to work, and produced, with much labour and and pain, the following remarkable effusion :—

"DERE MATTY,

"i hav got to lunnon and Send this by the salsbury coach wich the good gard Says yu shale have at Onst dere matty i have bin badd used they Roled me down the hill in a ttub and then locked me up in a round Hous and i had to

pay wich i will ttell you master Crosbe have
 gotten a nu Name so i am goen to see him
 to night as i no he will Come back and marry
 miss Elsie at Onst dere Matti he is erle of
 grassthorp and a peir the prests told me
 Wear to find him Dere mate they were
 Very ggood to me but lundn be a mighty big
 wicked Place and deisperit costli dere mati
 you will tel mis Ety who is to read this for
 yew an der matey i sens my respeks to
 master and misses witch yew May as well
 not tell to them mayhap till I come back an
 all frens. dere Matty i am kwite Well But
 very soar from tthe ttub as i hop Yew ar an
 my nam is

“THOMAS SAMSON.”

Having finished this epistle, he sealed it
 with a lump of the saddler's wax he always
 carried in his pouch, and directed it to

“Matty”

att mister Steeles sadler

in Winterbourne bye ye Salsbury coch

Plese make Haste,”

then handed it to the guard, who faithfully promised that the document should be given at Salisbury to the driver of the stage waggon, with instructions to deliver at once.

This weighty matter disposed of, Samson resolved to permit himself at least this one day's relaxation, and set about enjoying himself in a manner which was none the less laudable though it might appear to modern eyes just a little eccentric. By way of making a commencement, he asked the guard what London contained that was worthy of inspection. That worthy's imagination as to the resources of the town being bounded by the coaching offices, Samson began a day of delirious excitement by surveying the exteriors of all he could find, and, this done, he walked down Ludgate Hill, passing through the noisy and stinking market and the scarcely less noisome liberties of the Fleet, and along the Strand in search of saddlers' shops, observing with much wondering speculation the lightness of the tackle

displayed, which he promptly attributed to the general dishonesty of London, evidenced, in this instance, by the fact that even the saddlers skimped their work and cheated their customers of leather.

Emerging upon Whitehall, he was filled with delight at the brave spectacle which presented itself through the paling of the park. A crowd of chairs jostled and swayed along the walks, picturesque groups of gaily-dressed women, patched and powdered, and got up with all the elaboration which hoops and lace and brocade could lend, accompanied by men in raiment equally gaudy, periwigs, and immaculate ruffles, flitted among the rows of trees, while on the broad road, at the side, he saw, passing and repassing, carved and gilded chariots drawn by horses which were almost covered with needlessly-elaborated harness.

Then his attention was called to a long, many-windowed structure, flat and straggling,

and from which there issued from time to time the gaudiest among the gaudy crowd. Overcome by curiosity, Samson summoned courage to ask what this building might be. "St James's," was the reply. It was enough for Samson ; this horrible building, a compound of barrack and poorhouse, was the palace of the King, compared with whom he firmly believed all other potentates were as sparrows to an eagle.

The information caused him to stare so long and earnestly that he received a gentle intimation from an officer that, unless he wished to see the inside of the round-house, he had better depart.

Samson had no wish for a second dose of that expensive experience, so promptly took the hint, going off in the direction of a building which towered on the opposite side of the Park, and which he judged, from its size, must be one of the sights of London. Nor was he mistaken ; it was the fane of Edward

the Confessor, the mausoleum of all that was greatest and most intellectual in the land.

The wonders of this magnificent temple had reached even to Winterbourne, so that Samson had not to ask what building he stood before. As others were entering Samson followed them ; it was service time, so he was allowed to go in without paying. Samson was no artist, consequently upon him the exquisite architecture and noble proportions of the structure were lost ; nevertheless, in a dim way he felt that this was the most wonderful of all his strange experiences, and the one that would linger longest in his memory. He would have liked to wander round the building, but he found that his Father's house had once again been made a place of merchandise, and emphatically one in which riches and poverty stood not upon an equal footing. As he had no half-crown wherewith to fee the hungry verger, he was excluded from worship in the

choir, and the lad could not repress a feeling of resentment at the injustice as he looked through the grills which shut him out from a place into which he felt he had a right to enter.

On emerging from the venerable pile he crossed the square to another building somewhat unpretentious, not to say shabby, in appearance, which he learned with considerable surprise was the place where laws were made and administered. He entered without let, and found himself free to wander down the great hall of Rufus into the little boxes wherein sat the judges of the awful and mysterious tribunals of Chancery, King's Bench, and Exchequer. Even Samson could not help contrasting the anomalies of a social system which required a fee for the privilege of worshipping God, and provided a judge to hang him for nothing. In the Court of Exchequer he could have lingered for a whole day, so fascinated was he by the mysterious chequered cloth which

covered its table, and the scarlet robes of the presiding barons, though he wondered much why the administration of justice required that its servants should cover their heads with the hair of horses. But the day was far advanced, and the barristers being no longer able to decipher their briefs the courts adjourned, and Samson was once more left to his own resources.

Naturally the first thing he did was to find a chop-house, for sight-seeing had made him desperately hungry.

Fortune seemed determined to befriend him to-day, for after wandering about a couple of miles he at length entered a place of entertainment, which was not only cheap but as clean as the interior of a Wessex ale-house, and the people so civil and obliging that he mustered up courage to ask them if they would give him a bed for the night, which they readily promised to do, not even making any objections when he told them

that he should have business which might keep him out until the small hours of the morning.

“Oh! that is nothing,” said the woman; “night is much the same as day to us; we have to open at three o’clock on account of the market hard-by in Covent Garden. What time do you want to go?”

“That I don’t rightly know, missus; I did ought to be there about twelve o’clock, but then there’s gettin’.”

“Where is it you are going?”

“’Tis called Red Lion Square. Hast heard on’t?”

“To be sure have I and a mighty genteel place, too, not twenty minutes’ walk from here, just out of Holborn.”

To Samson this appeared to be the general location of everywhere; he was mildly surprised that he should not have met Lord Grassthorpe in his many wanderings up and down that thoroughfare.

“What be that big building at yon corner?” was his next question.

“Why, that’s Drury Lane Theatre, to be sure. Hsh! that gentleman in the corner box is going to act there to-night. Many of them comes in here in the evening for a cup of my good coffee.”

“That’s a play-actor, missus! Why, he ain’t a bit like the Joey in the jerry-go-nimble at our fairs; he be dressed a deal finer than that’en.”

“Why, you jolternoddle, you don’t surely think that one of the king’s players goes about like a clown at a wake?”

“Well, I didn’t know, missus; do he act dressed up so?”

A low laugh from the subject of the discussion informed the woman that he had overheard the conversation.

“Hast never seen a play, lad?” asked his hostess; “’tis jannock, I tell ye.”

“No,” returned Samson, “but I’d like’en amazin’.”

“Would you?” interposed the gentleman, who had come forward and was now standing by the woman’s elbow; “then if you’ll come with me you shall. I must go in and make ready now; you will have some time to wait before the play begins, but I imagine you will be able to amuse yourself by watching the house fill. Come!” And Samson, with muttered thanks, got up and followed the mummer.

How he enjoyed the evening it doth not concern this tale to record, save that he found it all too short, and that he applauded with all his might the actor who impersonated with more than adequate lung force the trying part of the much-persecuted hero, whose tragic end impressed him deeply, quite unconscious that in so doing he was tendering his best thanks to his friend of the coffee-house. Plays were not remarkable for their brevity in those days, and audiences were accustomed to at least five hours

amusement for their money, so by the time Samson had told the landlady at the chop-house his impressions of the English drama and had eaten his supper, he discovered to his consternation that it was past the time at which he had determined to wait upon the Earl of Grassthorpe. So, snatching his hat, he set off at full speed up Drury Lane.

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At this point we feel called upon to follow the fortunes of that wonderful epistle which took its departure per the Salisbury coach for Winterbourne on the morning of this, to Samson, at least, most eventful day.

The guard was as good as his word, and the letter was delivered with all possible despatch ; that is to say, on the second day after it was written.

Ever since Samson had taken his departure, Mattie had been expecting a letter, and had given strict instructions—lodging therewith sufficient money to pay for even a

double letter—to the representative of his Majesty's post at Winterbourne, that should a missive come it was not to be sent on to her, and every day she managed to call at least once at the office to see if one had arrived, as by this means she would be able to keep her master in the dark as to her correspondence. When it had arrived she hied her at once to the blacksmith's, and was fortunate enough to find Hetty within and alone.

"I ha' gotten this letter, Hetty," said Mattie, "an' as 'ee knows I cannot read I ha' brought'en in for ye to read to me; but thou must not say a word on't, as it be from Samson, an' be all about the poor lass over at Hockley. How be she, Hetty?"

"Sh—h! Mattie, don't speak so loud," replied the mayor's daughter; "father's in the next room, and he mustn't hear Elsie's name mentioned. He seems very bitter about Mr. Steele; I don't know why, I am sure, unless

it be that he's heard they be going to make thy master mayor over his head. Then did you know all about Samson going away?" she added in an intensely audible whisper.

"Yes, for sure, he's gone oop to Lunnon;" and then honest Mattie related the whole story of Samson's departure so far as she knew it.

"'Twas noble of him, for sure; yes, that it was," said Hetty when the other had finished. "Please God he may be successful if it will do Elsie any good, though that Crosby be as graceless a knave as ever was made i' God's image."

"How be she?" asked Mattie again.

"Worse, poor heart. Aye, Mattie, but she be frettin' worse than we know."

"Well," exclaimed Mattie, emphatically, "be she ill or be she well, I cannot stop blathering here all day, so read me the letter and let me begone!"

By this time both the girls had forgotten

the necessity there was for secrecy, consequently, Mr. Tyler, in the next room, became possessed of every word.

“It is good news,” said Mattie, when it had, with much difficulty and discussion, been made out. “May I be doited if e’er I calls that lad a fool agin. But he be wrong, Hetty, he be wrong; Elsie mun know nought about it; if that Crosby don’t come the disappointment will kill her, an’ if he do come ’twont do her no good to tell her on’t aforehand and let her moil and fret i’ watching for ’en.”

To this Hetty agreed and Mattie went back to the saddler’s house to account for her absence as best she could.

Hetty was right, Tyler’s bitterness at this time against his neighbour knew no bounds. Only to-day he had learned that it was finally settled that he was to be supplanted by Steele in his office of mayor, which office had lately, by the opportunities it afforded

for speculation, constituted his main resource, and his bitterness was further augmented by the knowledge that it had been on the carpet for some time past to transfer the aldermanship of the gild-merchant to the new mayor, should a new one be elected, and if this were done, Tyler knew that he would be within measurable distance of the poor-house.

After Mattie had left, the blacksmith remained in a fixed attitude, looking moodily on the stones at his feet, his hands thrust deep into the capacious pockets of his breeches, and his head sunk low down upon his breast. Slowly raising his eyes till they rested on the line of junction between the ceiling and the opposite wall, his nether jaw dropped and dropped, until it seemed to hang insecurely by a hinge which had been strained, and in cavernous tones there issued from his chest a stream of invective fierce and foul: "Now may all the curses of hell

light upon yonder carrion an' his wanton daughter. All I ha' played for, an' all I ha' done, ain't no good. 'Oons, hell an' fury ! If I could but tell the wench that her leman wor a comin', an' then could kill him before her eyes, an' her wi' the sight on't, I'd e'en go happy to the gallows. And may the devil fly away wi' me if I don't e'en do something so like it as makes no odds. Curse the witches that twists all I does around an' around until I be baffled an' beat at every turn. Here ha' I gi'en my soul an' staked my all on requiting my enemy i' like kind as he dealt wi' me, an' I mun e'en be content wi' helpin' to make him grandsire of an earl ! ”

CHAPTER VI.

“HERE THEN, BUMPERS, YOU ROGUES !
BUMPERS !”

“HAVE another card ?”

“Thanks.”

“Another ?”

“Ye-es. Thanks, I stand.”

“Another for you ? Hang it, you’ve got a natural. Filthy luck I’ve got to-night. I’ll pay twenty. I say, Braddock, these three men have got twenty-one ; it’s damned hard lines, second round. Sell your deal ?”

“No,” said the gentleman addressed, “let’s leave off now ; you ought to be satisfied with your losings to-night, Grassthorpe. Give you your revenge another time. Pass the claret.”

The rest seemed willing enough to leave off play. Four hours' gambling on end is very tiring, even when you win, and claret is more acceptable than an ace when the dealer has doubled. The wine went merrily round, and already more than one had enough and to spare. In accordance with the good old rule, more honoured in the breach than in the observance in these degenerate days, various ladies were drunk to, and the interference of heaven on their behalf tipsily and noisily invoked. Several times had the wine gone round, and one after another had honoured the lady of his choice, when the devil put it into the head of our hero to give Elsie as the toast. One toast was as good as another to most of them, and her health would have been drunk as quietly, or as noisily, as the rest, but for the unlooked-for awaking of Mr. Thomas Neville, a gentleman much given to intermittent napping, followed by not too lucid intervals, who must

needs put in his unlucky oar by asking, "Whosh Elsie, eh?"

"Girl I know," laconically and somewhat gratuitously replied our hero.

This explanation was not satisfactory to the questioner, and, to tell the truth, the reply was not calculated to enlighten a brighter wit than that possessed by Mr. Thomas Neville; so he remarked again,—

"'Course, she ish a girl you know; wash she a mistress of yoursh, tha'sh what I means?"

There were times when this very question would have been received as quite a commonplace compliment, but to-night Arthur chose to take it as an offence; perhaps his conscience was slightly pricked; perhaps a recent experience with a certain fascinating and heartless woman of the town, in which our friend had only come off second best to his friend and rival the Duke of Bancaster, and the abrupt question put the relation between

himself and the simple-minded country girl in a light altogether new and not altogether flattering to his self-esteem.

“No—why—curse it, I don’t know why I should answer your inquisitive questions! It’s my own business, isn’t it?” cried Arthur, with rising wrath, turning to his other guests.

“H’m,” muttered the Colonel; “yes, certainly it is your business, *and* the girl’s.”

“Hold your tongue, Tom!” said his brother. “You’re drunk; don’t be a fool and make a row!”

“Row! why sh’d I want make row? Wants t’know girlsh namesh, thash all. Hang me, but I’d tell if she were minesh, only too proud, not ’shamed,” explained that gentleman stupidly.

“Well, I shall not tell you anything at all about her,” said Arthur, with an attempt at dignity that was pitiful to see; “except

that I met her while I was at——away, and that she's the best little woman in the world."

"Besht little woman," grunted Tom, in a kind of drunken reverie, who was just sober enough to make himself thoroughly objectionable, and drunk enough to be convinced that he was the best of good company. "Besht little woman in the world, oh yesh, I have it, besht little woman, not the honestsh, you mean?"

"Damn you, for a drunken fool!" yelled Lord Grassthorpe. "Don't you see you annoy me? Can't you leave her alone? Why don't you hold your drunken tongue? What business is she of yours?"

"Lord Grassthorpe," simpered Mr. Tom's brother in a solemnly idiotic manner; "you really mushn't call my brother a fool before me, you really mushn't, y' know, I'm quite hurt. No!—I'll—I'll—it is too cruel;" here this gentleman was so touched with the

“BUMPERS! YOU ROGUES, BUMPERS!” III

cruelty of the proceedings that he began to cry copiously.

Arthur made no reply, and our readers may be relieved to know that the Hon. William Neville had quite forgotten the circumstance next morning, and indeed was entirely ignorant as to where he had supped over night.

Braddock goodnaturedly turned the conversation, and for fully ten minutes there was no more quarrelling. The party was fast settling down to get amicably drunk in sober earnest, when Arthur, in telling some story, happened to say——

“So he said, ‘Mr. Crosby, I am surprised——’”

At this point the Hon. Tom Neville, whom nature certainly had not blessed with a faculty for holding his tongue, interrupted once more with, “Met a fellow ashkin’ for you t’other night, Grashthorpe; call’d you Crobbish, Gad, sho he did,

Crosbish, call'd you Grashthorpe, no—no, Crosbish, I meansh Grashthorpe.”

“Asking for the devil!” exclaimed Arthur; “who was he, and what did he want?”

“Z'don't know who he wash, z'don't know, hic! whatsh wanted,” hiccupped Mr. Neville; “said his name wash—whatsh did he—hic—shay's name wash, Jack? And he wanted you—or shome other—mansh,” and the speaker looked stupidly at Arthur from under heavy eyelids.

“Where did you meet him?” asked the inquired for, sharply.

“Meet him, didn't meetshim, oh yesh, did though—Jack an' I met him. Where did we meet him, Jack? Zhou know, f'l'lr that's called Grashby Crosbthorpe.”

Jack, being thus a second time appealed to, took up the narrative and said, “Lord, it was such a lark; Tom an' I an' a lot of the others were coming home from the Bedford, where we'd been to a cocking

match ; gad, but there were some fine birds. You know that man at the Spaniards, he brought down a pack to match Ned Coggin's red-pile birds——”

“Yes,” interrupted Arthur testily ; “yes. And this fellow ? ”

“Oh ! ah ! yes. Well, this fellow, he stood in the road, wanted to take the wall, like his confounded impudence. Pass the claret.”

“What was he like ? ” questioned Arthur, as he complied with the request, and whose curiosity was now thoroughly roused.

“Oh, a red-headed, moon-faced, speckled, pot-bellied chuff as ever you clapped eyes on ; said his name was—something in the Bible——”

“Ha - ab - ba—hic—kuk,” suggested the Honourable Tom.

“No, it was something like the king of France's executioner, because I remember I said to Castlewood, perhaps they're relations. Fellow looked like a farmer or—or—

something. Tom got behind him and began to tweak him, when he turned round and sent out his arms for all the world like a what-d'ye-call-it; we were all going to set on him and give it to him for his curst impudence in trying to hit a gentleman who was doing him no harm. You wern't doing him any harm, were you, Tom?"

But Tom was peacefully slumbering long ere this.

So Jack resumed, after draining a cup or two: "Then he called out, 'Please leave me alone, gentlemen, and tell me if you know where one Mr. Crosby lives.' Gad, I believe the chuff had been asking every Charlie he met where you lived. 'Crosby,' says Castlewood, 'what Crosby do you mean?' 'Arthur Crosby,' whines the loon. Give me some burgundy, and Tom—give Tom some," quoth the speaker, interrupting himself.

"Here's the bottle," exclaimed Arthur, with ill-concealed impatience; "let Tom be,

can't you? He has had as much as he can hold already, I tell you, and for God's sake get on with the story.”

“No, he hasn't; he hasn't had enough. You havn't had enough, have you, Tom?” yelled Jack in his ear.

Tom started to his feet and gazed tipsily on the company with glazed eyes that swayed and swam like the lights of two buoys in a ground swell, while they shouted at him to know if he really had or had not taken enough wine, a question rendered entirely superfluous by the mottled and purple condition of his countenance.

Full five minutes were consumed in making him understand the momentous nature and gravity of the question, when, as was to be expected, he vociferously protested that he had not had enough, “stap his vitals if he had,” and that he was perfectly agreeable, nay, intensely anxious, to fight anybody who was ill-advised enough to say he had.

Then he had to be quieted, and Jack had to be persuaded to continue his story, a work of even greater patience than the other.

“Go on with your story, Jack,” roared Arthur, labouring under the popular delusion that drunken people comprehend loud things better than quiet.

“Story?” said Jack, vacantly, “what story?”

“About the man who asked to see me,” shouted the inquirer.

“Man who asht to shee me? No man asht to shee me. Wha’ d’you mean? Passh the claret. Thish bottle’s empty.”

“Oh, give him another,” said Arthur, impatiently drumming on the table.

The wine seemed to brighten Jack up a bit, and, after sundry minute explanations, he remembered that a man had asked to see Crosby, but no amount of persuasion could prevail upon him to take up the story where he left off. No, he must begin at the beginning again. Our readers must believe that

it is purely out of consideration to them that we decline to adhere strictly to his plan, preferring to go on from the point already reached.

"So Castlewood asked him," mumbled Jack, "what Crosby he meant." 'Arthur Crosby,' says the man. 'Arthur Crosby,' says I, 'who's he?' The fellow seemed to know you pretty well, Grassthorpe, for he said you were dark haired and quick tempered; so you are quick tempered, ain't you, Grassthorpe?" added he, innocently.

"Quick tempered enough to knock your ugly head off!" muttered our hero. "Get on, damn you, get on, for mercy's sake."

"There, I shaid you were quick tempered, gad, sho I did, didn't I, now, Neville?"

But Neville had gone to sleep in his turn, and Jack had no resource but to continue with his story, which he did ruefully, after being wound up with another glass or two of wine.

“Shaid you were quick tempered, s’help me he did, an’ Castlewood says, ‘Whatsh you mean, talkin’ of a gentleman like thash.’ Clever fellow, Chastlewood ish, isn’t he, now?”

“Yes, yes, go on.”

“Go on. I ain’t going till Tom goes; shleepsh at Tom’s. I ain’t goin’, not I, mi’boy. Lesh shee, where wash I? Oh! sho Castlewood pullsh his sword half out, when Tom, he shays, ‘I knows Croshby, an’ he livsh other end o’ the town.’ Nashty thing, thinksh I, to tell a dun where a gentleman livsh, beashtly nashty thing, washn’t it, Tom?”

“Damn nashty thing,” assented that laconic gentleman.

“Damn nashty; there now, Tom thinks it wash damn nashty, don’t you, Tom?”

“Yesh, I do,” again agreed that gentleman.

“Twash so, I assure you, an’ then Tom

tellsh this putt that you livsh i' shome street i' Kensington, hard by the palace, the house wherein Lord Commonshdale livsh, and the fellow whent 'way like a—a——”

Here the honourable gentleman's imagination failed him, and what Samson went away like we shall probably never know. However, he informed Arthur that they all laughed exceedingly, and “it wash a very clever thingsh of Tomsh to do, very clever, s' help him.”

Here ensued a dismal row, caused by Jack discovering that the Honourable Thomas Neville had dropped about half an ounce of candle grease into his glass. This Tom stoutly denied, though he had the lighted candle in his hand performing the operation at that very moment. So he and Jack quarrelled loudly and swore much; the other gentlemen had to be woke up to quiet them. At length the quarrel was decided by Jack falling asleep and resisting all efforts to

be awakened. Then Tom explained his views to the company, who sat round looking as wise as owls and blinking much more.

“Versh pretty storyish Jack told—great liar Jack—aint he, Grashthorpe? all 'bout that fellow whatsh-his-name, ashking for Cashtlewood, no Cashtlewood askin' for Jack, an' Jack sendin' him to Kennington, stap my vitals, no! Me shendin' him to Jacksh, I meansh an' Cashtlewood goin' Kennington, down at Bennittsh, or shome-where; funny, wasn't it? Jacksh askin' Bennett to Cashtlewoodsh to tea and cardsh i' middle of the palash, and Tom, I mean whash-his-name, thatsh who I mean. Now you tell me about thash girl, whash-her-name, the girl you wouldn't talk 'bout, theresh good fellow. Wake up, Jack, Arthursh goin' to shing song 'bout whats-name—hic—Hellish!”

This last speech was too much for Arthur's patience, particularly when he caught his

friend Colonel Kirton gravely smiling from the end of the table; so he rapped out an oath or two and informed Tom that he was not to mention her name.

“All righ,” said that worthy; “play you for her at cardsh, then.”

“You won’t if I’m in my right senses,” yelled Arthur savagely.

“Never mind, old boy,” grunted the Honourable Thomas, with a leer and a wink; “male Croshby, bad lot male Croshbys, sho whatsh her name—old lady wi’ beard, shays,” he added with a wise shake of the head.

This description was so true of Lady Grassthorpe that all the party who were sober enough to comprehend anything, burst into a roar of laughter, which still further enraged our hero.

“Leave my aunt alone, you drunken beast, or, by —— I’ll knock your head off!”

“Mister Grashthorpe, meansh m’lord

Croshby, I won't have my brother calls— whatsh did he call him,” remonstrated the Honourable William; “my brother, my brothersh ash good as any other man, dash my wig, if he aint.”

At this point the Honourable William burst into a loud laugh, flung down a decanter, and then calmly sat down on it. This laugh changed into a yell of agony, and Kirton ran to his assistance, pulled him up, and took as much of the glass out of him as he could at so short notice. His coat, breeches and the decanter were most hopelessly destroyed. Of course this unlucky incident averted Arthur's wrath, and the company agreed it was time to go home. So the bell was rung for a chair for the Honourable William, who was leaning disconsolately against the wall, while the Honourable Thomas, minus his wig, tried to gather up the pieces of broken glass to insert in some gentleman's cocked hat.

Whilst the racket was at its height, the door at the end of the room was thrown open and the servant announced “Mr. Thomas Samson.”

Arthur started violently ; for the life of him he had not been able to help connecting Jack Bannister’s story of the “moon-faced chuff” with Mr. Steele’s apprentice at Winterbourne. Still, he had argued, what could Samson possibly want with him. So, not very much surprised, he told the servant to say that he would come to the gentleman.

The order was too late, for Samson, white, haggard and distraught, had burst into the room, crying out as he wrung his hard and knotted hands, “Mr. Arthur, Mr. Arthur, she’s ill, sir! God help me, she’s ill, she’s ill!”

“Gad!” said the Honourable Tom, desisting from his employment ; “it’s the fellow I d’rected, hang me if it aint.”

“Yes, sir,” said Samson sadly ; “yes, sir, it

is, and a long and useless walk you gave me."

"Teasch you to threaten gentleshmansh, whatsh his name said so. 'An I shay alwaysh be 'spectful to superiors, yesh, shir, damn your eyes;" added the censor of morals, with a profound shake of the head.

Arthur had been too astounded to speak for a moment. Elsie, whom he had left in health, ill, and sending for him! Bless her, but she was a good girl, and he a villain to deceive her; he saw it all now. There, but it might not be true; Samson had not said who was ill—so he told himself with a faint feeling of hope.

"Who's ill; you don't mean Elsie?"

"Yes, sir; Miss Elsie, God help me; Miss Elsie," sobbed Samson. "You go to her, for heaven's sake, do go, sir, do!"

"Sho thish is — Hellish — hic — wouldn't tell us 'bouher, shly dog—hic, Croshbish," remarked Tom; "never r'fuse t'tell—hic—

shure to come out—stap my vitals—hic—
'twill. She's his mishtresssh.”

Grassthorpe rushed at the sot where he stood, but Kirton pulled the Honourable Thomas out of the way, so the furious blow was uselessly spent on the wall, to the detriment of the gentleman's knuckles. When we are in trouble what a relief it is to hit somebody, or to get angry about something!

“Mansh mad,” said Tom, from his retreat behind Colonel Kirton; “mad ash a hatter, 'pon my soul. Hold him, you fellowsh, put him in Bedlam. Gonesh ravin' mad, cos of Hellish.”

The Colonel thought this last speech was too much, so he gave the Honourable Thomas a lunge which cannoned him off Arthur on to the floor. Neither of them being very steady on their legs, they both fell down, and rolled one over the other with a lighted candle under them. As soon as it had set fire to the wig of the offender, it went

out, and in its place, there arose a mighty stench. Both were a little sobered when they picked themselves up; the wig was extinguished, and the company dispersed. All this time Samson had been standing in a corner watching the behaviour of real gentlemen for the first time in his life; it is hardly necessary to record that he was not over favourably impressed by it. Arthur noticing him, opened a door leading into another room. "Go in there," he said, "I will come to you in a few minutes."

"And learn how to speak to gentlemensh before I—hic—shee you again," added the Honourable Thomas, magisterially.

At this Samson turned round; even a worm will turn, you know. "I hope I shall, sir, before I see you again," he said; a humble attempt at sarcasm, but as it was his first it is not to be despised. With this he went into the room.

"Bad b'haved putt, missher whatsh-his-

namesh, Grashthorpe,” quoth the gracious Thomas. “Damn bad, but don’t ’pologize, God bless you, g’dnight. God bless you.” Having pronounced his benediction, this very tipsy mortal suffered himself to be conveyed down the staircase by several of his dear friends, an achievement accompanied by considerable personal risk to the dear friends aforesaid. Shortly afterwards they were further conveyed to the round house for the crime of disturbing the king’s peace, and of breaking the head of an aged and unoffending Charlie.

When Arthur returned to the room after seeing the last of the amiable inebriates, he found all gone but Kirton, who was filling a pipe of tobacco. “I am going to have a smoke,” he said, “you go to your friend. When you have done I want to talk with you,—no, not now,” he added as he saw Grashthorpe was inclined to linger, “see him first.”

So our hero went to Samson, and the other, after lighting his pipe, sat down by the empty grate and ruminated: "There goes as good a natured man as ever God put breath into, utterly spoiled by his training and circumstances. First, his father, with his restless, agitating life, more like a nightmare than anything else; then that old sycophant, his uncle; and the court. I think if my child had lived and I had wished him to be ruined, body and soul, I should have sent him to wait on our king. What pleasure a man can find in drinking like Silenus and gambling like a helot I never could discover; but then I'm peculiar, they say; well, perhaps I am. A pretty reflection this room makes of its master, carpeted with broken bottles, torn cards, and battered candlesticks; how ghastly it all looks in the morning light! The young devil is bad enough; but he must needs take unto himself other devils worse than he, like that

drunken beast Tom Neville and his drivelling idiot of a brother. And that poor girl, the victim of his lust, lying helpless in her pain to-night, whilst he was sitting out his drunken orgie. I thought what the end would be when I heard of the game he was playing at Winterbourne. How is it that men, with the vaguest of intentions, manage perpetually to accomplish the most definite of evil deeds? The boy must marry her, for the sake of his own honour, if not for hers. Yes, that is his only course, and I must persuade him to take it, somehow. I wonder if men could be such fools if they could for one moment perfectly realize the sweetness of the love of a good woman. Lucky I came to this drunken revel to-night, for which, thank God, I have little enough taste now, though I suppose I had once. What a wretched kind of a life mine was before I knew Alie,—senseless debauchery all night, splitting headaches and the blue devils all

day. They say that a woman can make or mar a man ; well, there is some consolation in the reflection that this girl cannot possibly mar Grassthorpe. Who knows, she may be the making of him ; the ways of God are wonderful and past finding out. Anyhow, my course is plain ; for his sake, for the girl's sake, and for the sake of my own dead Alie, marry her he must and shall."

Here he fell to musing of his troublous life, his own wild days, until he met the fair girl whom he afterwards married. How sweet the courtship had been ; how they had both sorrowed when friends forbade the match, and, the tardy consent obtained, what rapture had been theirs !

Then of how they had married, he retiring from the army for a time ; of their life then, how simple, quiet, and perfectly happy. So they had lived for the next few years, during which one little child had appeared to draw their hearts even closer together, if that

were possible; then the war in Flanders broke out again, and he, as a good subject, must go and fight, his wife with weeping eyes tying the bow of his scarf which lay over a heart that, brave as it was, could not suppress an anxiety that was keener than the pain of fear. When he got into that dreary land of dykes and ditches, how full his thoughts were of his sweet wife, about to become a mother again, and his baby daughter in their pretty home amongst the hedgerows of Sussex. How he longed for news, and his heart hungered to see his dear ones again. Then word came that his wife was ill, and he must try and obtain leave to see her. But the army was marching; how could so loyal a soldier ask for leave in war time? How he and his wife sorrowed for each other, ocean-parted! At length, in her weariness, she sickened, and the little heir was born—dead. Then how bravely she wrote him not to come home on her ac-

count. The next letter brought him news of her and his baby girl's death. Fever in the low-lying village had carried off these with humbler victims. Then numb, deathly, heart-break; and the soldiers who had followed him, some from his own hamlet, how they pitied him and sorrowed, too! Life is not long enough for mourning and even heart-broken men must fight. How he had sought for death in the forefront of the battle, and found it not. Then how his health had failed, and leave was given for him to come home! How he hurried to Alie's grave; how religiously he kept the house as she had left it; he even sought out and found an old woman who had loved and nursed the fair, sweet girl from babyhood, and made her the housekeeper, with strict injunctions not to alter anything. Then he never entered the house again; but once a month he must go to plant flowers and tend the little tomb that held his sacred dead.

As the sun was gilding the houses, glinting through the window-panes, a few straggling rays fell on honest Kirton, sitting alone amid the wreckage of the night's debauch, musing on the short, happy episode of his wrecked and broken life. No rays of morning sun ever rested on more worthy man, for living in evil case he kept his heart true and clean, doing in the eyes of a modern and more fussy philanthropy but little. Yet who can tell all the measure of the good that little did.

CHAPTER VII.

PASSION IS PALSY, BUT PATIENCE IS POWER.

WHEN Arthur went into the adjoining room, boiling with rage and torn with every conflicting emotion, he was fully determined to vent his spleen on the unlucky wight who had, by his presence, so rudely disturbed his fancied security from what he considered his folly in embroiling himself with a tiresome country girl. The time which had elapsed since he left Winterbourne and the distance he had placed between the Earl of Grass-thorpe and the Arthur Crosby who had amused himself at Elsie's expense had lulled him into a certain sense of security which the coming of Samson had completely dispelled. So, with a full determination of

giving the poor fellow a piece of his mind, he opened the conversation by demanding,—

“What do you mean by dogging me in this fashion?”

Now Samson had been prepared, as he supposed, for nearly every kind of possible address, having painfully rehearsed suitable answers to all manner of imaginary questions for many a long hour since leaving his master's roof; but this particular form of salutation took him so completely by surprise that he got up from the chair in which he had been seated and merely gasped “I—I——.”

“Don't stand there gaping like an idiot!” shouted Arthur. “What do you mean, I say, by coming here and worrying me? Damme, I've a good mind to—to——”

“To what, sir?” asked Samson.

“Never you mind,” rejoined my lord, loftily. “Answer my question at once, sirrah.”

“I didn’t mean to take a liberty, my lord,” replied the apprentice humbly, fearful lest anything in his manner or speech should frustrate his design and hinder that which he had set his heart upon accomplishing. “I only thought that you would be glad to hear about Miss Elsie. I’m very sorry if I intruded; I didn’t know as you had company.”

“Damn your sorrow, rot you! Did you come all this way to tell me she was ill? Did she ask for me? Were you sent, or how was it? What’s the matter with her? Be quick, out with it, man. Are you a born fool?” he added, as Samson, very considerably puzzled by this involved catechism, hesitated to reply, scarce knowing where to begin.

“Yes, sir,—that is, I mean, no, my lord,” he stammered at length; “but I am”—Samson had begun this speech with an attempt at dignity, intending to say as

grandiloquently as he was able that his business was of no consequence, and then to march, with an affectation of supreme indifference, out of the room. But the picture of Elsie lying in that dim chamber yonder was all too much for his great heart, and, instead of making the dignified retreat he had intended, he burst into a flood of tears.

Arthur, in common with most men of his stamp, had a supreme disgust for a man who could shed tears, and would, in all probability, have been very rough and brutal with the apprentice, perhaps have kicked him down the staircase, for in those days "gentlemen" were not above such refined and delicate actions; but he, too, saw the vision which had appeared to Samson, and the sight of it had so far unmanned the blustering bully that he said in a softened voice,—

"Tell me about her, Samson; what's the matter with her?"

“Oh, sir,” blubbered Samson, “she’s—she’s a-dying.”

“You are a liar!” yelled Arthur, suddenly stopping and facing about.

“I hope I may be,” said the apprentice bitterly; “but it’s gospel truth, sir.”

“Tell me about her,” said Arthur again; “what’s the matter with her?”

“I don’t rightly know what’s the matter wi’ her, so to name it. After you left she fretted and fretted and peeked and pined till she made hersen ill, and now—now, she just lies there, an’ is so weak, so weak that she cannot move hersen. And all the time she cries and makes moan about you, and about——”

“What?” came from Arthur hoarsely.

Very quiet he was now, his jaw had dropped and the colour had all fled from his cheeks, leaving his face ghastly, and full of fear. In this moment of suspicion his very manhood was unfixed; he looked old,

and his eyes were cavernous and shining with a strange and fitful light.

“What?”

“Perhaps there is another now, Sir Arthur,” said Samson, very quietly, with downcast eyes, and averted head.

There seemed no relevancy in the remark ; but Arthur understood it. He dropped nervelessly into a chair, his back to the apprentice ; his haggard face fell on his flacid arms ; he quaked in the raw morning air as with an ague. Then, starting suddenly to his feet and gazing all round the room with unsteady eyes, he began wandering wildly up and down the apartment. Meanwhile Samson gazed vacantly at the carpet.

“How do you know this?” asked Arthur, stopping at length.

“I guessed it, in a manner of speaking.”

“And heard it?”

“Yes.”

“Who else knows?”

“Her father an’ mother—an’ Mattie, of

course—and, mayhap, one or two more,” said Samson, reluctantly and bit by bit, feeling, meanwhile, that Arthur’s eyes were drawing each particular word out of him.

With his hands clasped behind him Arthur strode desperately up and down the room. Only the dull, heavy ticking of the ponderous clock, which stood in its black case in an angle of the wall, solemnly emphasized the oppressive silence.

At length Samson could endure it no longer, and, throwing himself on his knees, with clasped hands and a choking sob in his voice, he burst forth into the prayer that welled up from the deep places of his soul,—

“Oh, Mr. Arthur, go to her, for God’s sake go to her. In pity go to her.”

“Hold your tongue, you impudent fool, and get up!” stormed the other, only too glad of an excuse to vent his passion upon the unoffending lad. “Mind your own business ; mind your own business, will you, and leave your betters to act for themselves ?

'Fore gad ! I could believe you were in love with her yourself ; but the idea is too absurd."

" Yes, I was in love with her myself, and God knows how gladly, how thankfully, I would have laid down my poor life to save her one moment of this shame and disgrace and pain that you have brought upon her."

Arthur struggled with himself; he felt inclined to curse Samson for his impudence, but the look of abject misery in the lad's eyes restrained him. The answer was as unexpected as it was unflattering; for a moment a black thought flitted across his soul; what if he should offer Samson a sum of money to marry the girl and take her away! But no—she was Elsie—his Elsie, and even Arthur Crosby's black heart revolted at the base suggestion.

" I did love her, I do love her," said Samson, after a pause; " do you think that if I didn't love her I should fetch *you*—the man she loves—the man who has ruined her,

to her side? Do you think it is pleasant for me to come here and look at you?"

"Did she send for me?" said Arthur; and seeing Samson shake his head, he added, "it was generous of you. I could not have done it, by God. I could not have done it for any one, damme."

"And you *will* go to her?" said Samson, with tremulous eagerness.

Arthur hesitated.

"I'll think about it. I—I've—so many things to do; the Court is in London, and my time is not my own," and Arthur tried to think of all the excuses he could suggest to himself. It would be a painful journey to take, and very humiliating, and if he could quiet his conscience without going he was anxious to do so.

"But what of Miss Elsie?" pleaded the apprentice. "Is she to die? Oh, Mr. Arthur, she will die if you don't go to her—she will—she will indeed."

“Do you really think she will, Samson?” asked Arthur.

“She will, for sure,” was the reply.

“But girls don’t die,” objected his lordship.

“Do you want her to?” said Samson, bluntly.

This was a very rude question, and Arthur felt inclined to knock the questioner on to the floor as he knelt.

“And you will go to her?”

“I’ll think about it,” said Arthur again.

“D’ye think she’d say that if it was you as was ill?” said Samson fiercely, starting to his feet.

An awkward fellow this Samson, gifted with an uncomfortable faculty of honesty which led him to ask most perplexing questions. This was one, so Arthur left it unanswered.

“I’ll see about it,” he once more said.

“But you will go?” persisted his questioner.

“Yes, I will,” slipped from Arthur’s lips, almost before he realized what he was saying.

“Thank God! Thank God!” ejaculated the apprentice, and seizing Arthur’s hand he covered it with kisses, as he continued hysterically sobbing, “Thank God! Thank God!”

“Thank God that another man is going to the woman you love?” said Arthur coldly.

“Yes,” was the passionate rejoinder; “yes, if it makes her happy.”

“By Heaven you do love her,” cried Arthur. “Better for her if she had loved you instead of me. You are a good man, and I—I am a villain!”

Samson thought so too; but he had carried his point, and hesitated to risk offending Arthur, lest he should turn round and refuse to go after all. But he was safe on this point: Lord Grassthorpe was so far a gentleman that, having passed his word, he would keep it. So he rose to depart, and was going to make a bow and pull his forelock in

orthodox Winterbourne fashion, when Arthur, seized with one of those generous impulses which, despite his base conduct, would ever and again reveal the better nature of the man, put out his hand and said, "Thank you, Samson, thank you for coming."

* * * * *

Morning was shining over the housetops as Samson reached his poor lodging, so different from the stately rooms he had left ; but he was too agitated to go to bed. He went in, and for a short space tried to fix his attention upon some of the good words written in the universal language of consolation ; but the letters swam before his eyes, and understanding nothing of what he read, he wearily closed the book and gave himself up to reflection ; his mind turning to the quaint old chamber in the old farm house at Hockley, where his love lay, and he wondered how the weary hours went with her.

There is a reaction of joy as of sorrow,

and Samson thought how that pale face would lighten and that feeble pulse quicken at the sound of the footstep the heart had been aching to hear. What exquisite misery it is to the lover when he reflects that another can bring that joy which he may never minister ! Glad and thankful as Samson was at the issue of his mission, he had been more than human had not his soul been troubled as he thought of these things, and envied Arthur.

For awhile he sat with his heart heavy and cold, as if it were stone ; then, as the sun rose higher, redeeming the scanty little room from its vulgarity, and gilding all things with its impartial glory, it reminded him strangely of that little chapel in the undercroft. So he wended his way down the narrow staircase and through the quiet streets till he came there, and then he told his new-found friends the priests, and they were thankful and rejoiced together.

CHAPTER VIII.

MORAL SURGERY.

WHEN, after showing Samson to the door, Arthur re-entered the room, which had been the scene of the previous night's revel, he found Kirton sitting over the hearth, his pipe gone out and himself gazing moodily into the spent embers. Very grey and ashen he looked ; old, too, and the lines about his usually kindly face looked hard and deep in the cold morning light.

“ Well, here I am, Kirton, entirely at your service,” began our hero, sinking into a chair ; “ you seem half asleep, and I am tired. Might I suggest that what you have to say to me should wait ? I suppose it's something about that confounded property of mine ? ”

“No,” said Kirton, rising and facing him ; “what I have to say, Grassthorpe, cannot wait.”

“Oh, very well, go on ; you’ll find me but a dull auditor, I fear.”

“What are you going to do about that girl at Winterbourne ?” asked Kirton bluntly.

“Really, Colonel Kirton, that is a question which, I take it, concerns myself only. I don’t acknowledge your right to question me upon the subject.”

“Possibly, from your point of view, I have no right ; but we will let that pass. Very well, that is agreed. Then I ask, as a favour, what you intend to do as, coupling what you have told me about the girl with what I have witnessed to-night, my interest is thoroughly aroused.”

“Oh, I am going to see her ; you see I could not get rid of that chuff without giving him a promise.”

“And you go at once, I suppose ?”

“In truth, Kirton, I have not decided ; there are such a lot of things to interfere : Lady Mitcheldever’s rout is to-morrow, and the day after I am expected at a cocking-match in Drury Lane.”

“Very weighty obstacles, to be sure,” said Kirton ; “but I cannot suppose that you will allow them to interfere in a matter which concerns your honour.”

“My honour ? ” queried Arthur, in amazement ; “I fail to see where honour comes in.”

“Your honour, I take it, consists in your redeeming your promise as speedily as possible ; in other words, in going down and marrying the girl at once.”

“Marrying the girl ! ” echoed the other, “I never promised anything of the sort. I only told the booby I would go down and see her.”

“Never mind what you told him,” said Kirton ; “what do you suppose he thought you meant ? ”

“What he thought is no business of mine.”

“Do you suppose that fellow would have come all the way from Winterbourne merely to ask you to go and see the girl? You know perfectly well he meant that it was necessary you should go and marry her; and that, if I understand the matter, without delay.”

“That is all very well in its way, Kirton; but you know perfectly well that marriage is out of the question. The idea is preposterous; how can I marry a girl like that?”

“What is the matter with the girl?” asked Kirton.

“Oh, she’s well enough, as girls go—rather a nice little girl—pretty and good, and all that.”

“I see, I see,” broke in Kirton impatiently. “She was good enough for you to seduce but not good enough for you to marry.”

"Yes, you see that's just it. She isn't exactly the sort of woman you could imagine as the mother of the future Earl of Grassthorpe, for instance."

"I don't know what sort of woman you picture for that office ; for my part I cannot but think that enough highborn women have tried their hands at making a good Earl of Grassthorpe, or even a respectable male Crosby ; but up to the present their success has not been remarkable. Why not give one of the other sort a chance ? The introduction of a good, healthy, honest stock might work wonders. Who knows ? "

"Thank you," said Arthur. "Then I understand you counsel me to marry a woman who is beneath me. Really, Kirton, the *rôle* of the honest friend suits you admirably."

"Listen ! I married a woman who was considered beneath me. I married her because I loved her and she loved me ; that

was our sanction, and we were happy. Do you suppose if I had been villain enough to abuse her confidence that such an action would have decreased my obligation to marry her? Rather would it not have increased it a thousandfold? Do you suppose that if I had been mean enough to take advantage of that which would never have been given except under the belief on her part that I intended to marry her, that I should not have felt myself bound by the laws of honour to make the only reparation in my power?"

"Villain! Mean! 's'death, sir; would you insult me? Do you dare to apply such epithets to me?"

"God forbid that I should seek to apply them, my lord, until I see how you act; but I warn you that if you fail to take the course which honour dictates I shall not hesitate to do so. Indeed, as a gentleman I shall have no other alternative."

“You are aware what this means, sir?” cried Arthur, livid with passion.

“Perfectly,” returned Kirton; “as I have not applied them there can be no ground of quarrel between us at present, nor will there be. I refuse to believe that an Earl of Grassthorpe, after reflection, can fail of acting the part of a gentleman.”

“’Tis no use quarrelling with you, Kirton,” hesitated Arthur, after a pause. “Of course I shall act as a gentleman, though, perhaps, our ideas upon the subject may differ.”

“Will your lordship kindly tell me what other course is open to a gentleman?”

“I proposed to allowance her,” said Arthur; “surely that is enough?”

“And let her live on the wages of shame for the rest of her life! A worthy return for the confidence she has reposed in you, indeed!” sneered Kirton. “And am I to understand such to be your idea of how a

gentleman should act in these circumstances ? ”

“ I don’t know ; I suppose so. Anyhow, I don’t see why I should be hectored by you ! ”

“ Well,” said Kirton, deliberately, “ if you are content that the Earl of Grassthorpe should be known as a liar, I have nothing more to say.”

“ I’ll be damned if I stand this any longer ! I have taken too much from you already. You shall fight me.”

“ I shall do nothing of the kind. My honour requires me to fight with none but gentlemen. Prove yourself one and you will find me ready to give you all the satisfaction you may want.”

Arthur flung himself back in his chair.

“ Go on, Kirton, take any further liberties you may please, it is a matter of indifference to me. You have been a tried and faithful friend to my father and my uncle, so I must bear with you.”

“Yes, I have been an old friend to the house, and its honour is very dear to me ; I should be false to the memories of those you have mentioned if I could let it be flung away without a struggle. Under no circumstances can I fight with you ; if I did I should kill you. What chance have you with your petty tricks of fence and a hand unsteady with wine against a man who has fought under Marlborough ? No, my lord, it shall never be said that an old house was cut off by one who had been accounted its friend. Let me plead with you, by the memory of my own dead and dearly-beloved wife——”

“Really, Kirton——”

“If this girl be good and pure and true to you, let me beseech you, by all that is sacred, to marry her. Marry her at once, if only for the sake of the unborn child, your heir. Think, she has made far greater sacrifices for you than you can ever make for her.”

"My dear Kirton, it can't be done. I am cleaned out, and up to my eyes in debts; you know as well as I do that I have raised every penny I can on the place. I have not even the money to get to Winterbourne much less to pay for a license. Lady Grassthorpe would enjoy living in a house with bailiffs for servants!"

"From what I have heard of the lady I think well enough of her to be sure that with you for her husband she would be willing to live in a house without servants."

"Anyhow, it cannot be, so don't tease me, Kirton."

"Is money the only obstacle?"

"Y—es," said Arthur slowly.

"A few hours will put that right," said Kirton, looking at his watch. "I have enough Virginia Stock left to manage that."

"Damn it all, man, I can't take your money."

"I took your uncle's before I got my

troop, so you need have no qualms on that score. 'Twill be but the repayment of an old debt; besides, man, what are a few counters more or less to either of us when honour is at stake? Now, Grassthorpe, go and take some rest; the morning is well on already, and you have a busy day before you."

He shook Arthur warmly by the hand, then said with evident effort, "My lord, I ask your pardon for having used words which were rightly offensive to you; I spoke then in the heat of passion, but your lordship will do me the justice to remember that; even so, I refused to believe that an Earl of Grassthorpe could be other than a gentleman."

CHAPTER IX.

AWAKENING HONOUR.

A MAN less versed in the inconsistencies of his species than was Colonel Kirton would have been completely taken aback when on returning from his morning ride he found Arthur, not only waiting for him, but fully dressed, and that with scrupulous care, pacing the eating-room with ill-concealed impatience, for his lordship was not accustomed to, indeed his manner of life forbade, early rising. But, truth to tell, neither of the men had been to bed ; Kirton because he thought it was not worth while for so short a time, so had compromised the matter by snatching an uncomfortable sleep

in an easy chair, and Arthur because he felt that it would be waste of energy for him to attempt to sleep. So he had endeavoured to kill painful thought by a critical examination into the condition of his wardrobe.

“What a time you have been, Kirton,” was his greeting upon the other’s entrance.

“Have I? Not longer than usual, I assure you; but had I supposed your lordship intended to honour me with your company at breakfast I would willingly have curtailed my ride; but, i’faith, if I might suggest, it is your lordship who is unusually early. However, there is no time lost, for I see your man has not brought in the chocolate.”

“Oh, hang the chocolate!” rejoined Arthur pettishly, “we are not going to wait for that, I take it for granted.”

“No, my lord? but I fear we shall have to wait until there is a market for the stock. Is there anything in the *Public Advertiser* concerning Virginia?”

“I don’t know, I am sure. I have not opened the thing.”

Kirton turned up his eyes in mild amazement, but without saying anything walked across the room, and taking up the paper satisfied himself that the value of the stock was not likely to have gone down, and this done turned to the column devoted to manly sport, and commenced to read.

“I wish you would put that confounded thing down,” cried Arthur. “I’ve a bad attack of the blue devils this morning, Kirton. I’ve not been to bed for thinking of this precious business. What time will there be a market, as you call it, do you suppose? You don’t apprehend any difficulty about selling that stuff, do you? Anyhow, money or no money, I shall know no peace till I get on the road; nor, indeed, shall I know any then till I get to the end of my journey. ’Od rot it, if I have to leave without paying Mackreth for those infernal

counters, I must go. Then there are the Jews, Kirton. Aye, thank God for the Jews! Surely my credit is not pawned so heavily as that I can't raise five hundred pounds somehow? What are you sitting there for, man, shaking your head as if you had got a palsy? Of course I don't intend to go to those devils if I can help it. Look you, sirrah"—to the servant who entered bearing the chocolate—"if you can't keep hours you will have to find another service. Put that down and get you gone, and bring us something to eat, will you?"

Here Arthur furnished Kirton with fresh food for wonder, for, quite forgetful of his dignity, he seized the chocolate can and proceeded to help them both.

Breakfast concluded, Kirton, after consulting the timepiece, came to the conclusion that they might start for 'Change, and suggested to Arthur the advisability of ordering the chariot.

“No, hang it, Kirton, those fellows of mine are so plaguy slow, and I cannot for the life of me stand their pace this morning. Gad’s life, everybody will have left ’Change long before these fellows are ready! Find your hat, man, and come along ; we will hire a hackney.”

To which impassioned adjuration Kirton offered no opposition. Consequently, in the course of half-an-hour, both the men were standing in the Virginia walk of the Exchange. The broker to whom Colonel Kirton had entrusted the management of his financial affairs was compelled to keep them waiting for some few minutes before he could attend to the business, and then some time was spent in verifying the accounts, during which interval Arthur stamped up and down the walk in a fever of impatience. Some of the older *habitue's* of the place shook their heads and whispered that “my lord” had been unfortunate in his speculations.

At length, Kirton rejoining him. Arthur demanded eagerly whether he had got the money.

"No," said Kirton, smiling at his impatience ; " the broker is just now seeking a purchaser. I trust he may not be long in finding one."

" Confound it all, why don't he buy it himself ? "

" Doubtless, my lord, he would be so obliging, but I fear me it would be at his own price, which would hardly be likely to suit our purses."

In due course, that is to say within half-an-hour, the broker found a purchaser, who was willing to give Kirton the full market price for his stock, whereupon the transfer was concluded and the party adjourned to the bank, where Kirton received the money in payment, from which he handed Arthur a sum of five hundred pounds. Arthur's hand shook as he took the notes, and he was

forced to turn his head aside before he could control his voice sufficiently to say :—
“Humph, that’s all right.” Then thrusting the notes into his pouch, he added, “I suppose our next business is to redeem those precious counters of mine.”

“But whilst we are in the neighbourhood, had we not better go down to the Commons and see about the license?” suggested Kirton.

“The Commons?”

“Doctor’s Commons is the place I refer to, for the marriage license,” replied Kirton.

“Oh, confound it! I am a peer; I should have presumed that a license was unnecessary,” retorted Arthur, with indignant surprise. “I cannot waste more time, Kirton.”

“Your lordship would wish your marriage to be legal and regular I am sure,” remarked the elder man quietly.

“It shall be absolutely beyond question, Kirton. I will certainly have no risk run. Come along, man.”

And Arthur set off at a pace which his companion, even had he been able, showed no disposition to keep up with. During the short walk down Cheapside and round St. Paul's Churchyard the gallant Colonel, who set up as a man of taste, called Arthur's attention several times to the fine buildings just then replacing the meaner ones which had hastily replaced those burnt down during the great fire, and particularly to the giant Cathedral they were passing; he pointed out at some length, and with considerable attention to detail, the superior advantages of the classic style in architecture over the heathenish edifices which had been erected in, what he was pleased to term, the Gothic ages; these latter, he insisted, were vulgar, gaudy, and wanting in taste, built, as they had been, by those who had neither the models of antiquity before their eyes, nor the treatises of those philosophers who had investigated the true causes of beauty and sublimity at hand, so it was not wonderful that meanness

appeared where sublimity had been intended, and that grandeur had been sacrificed for the sake of the superfluous, cumbersome, and paltry, which disgusted those acquainted with classic models. But discourse he never so learnedly, Kirton could but obtain from Arthur the merest semblance of interest, so, in despair, he gave up the task and they finished the walk in silence.

The proctor to whom they applied exhibited the utmost eagerness to comply with his lordship's wishes, but as our hero insisted that he must have a license which would enable him to be married at any hour, in any place, he was obliged to refer him to the Archbishop, who was then in residence at his palace in Lambeth.

As they were leaving, the conversation turning upon the business, other than enabling people to marry, conducted by these gentry of Doctor's Commons, Kirton, who, was not of the best-informed in such matters, hazarded that they had to do with the making of wills.

"Then they shall make my will," said Arthur promptly, and without another word he returned to the building they had just left, leaving the Colonel standing in the little courtyard which faces the deanery of St. Paul's.

Presently he returned.

"And now for the club," he said cheerily. "I have made my will, Kirton, heaven knows there was not much to leave, for the estates are entailed, but if anything were to happen to me before I married, I have done my best for the girl and—and the child; and if I die afterwards—one never knows what may happen—I have left you trustee for her and guardian for the child. 'Pon my honour, all you will get for being executor is a mourning ring, I promise you."

On the way the pair called, at Kirton's suggestion, in Red Lion Square, to order the carriage to be sent to the club as soon as might be after them. Arthur grudged the

time this consumed, but the elder man pointed out that in all probability it would be a saving in the end, as the Archbishop's lackeys would be likely to pay more attention to gentlemen who drove up in a carriage bearing an earl's coronet than to a couple who walked to the door.

After completing his business at the club, Arthur, accompanied by his friend, entered the carriage and drove to the Archiepiscopal palace.

Kirton's surmise proved correct, for the flunkeys were obsequious, and, although his Grace was dining in state, our hero was soon possessed of a magical document, whereby the most reverend Metropolitan empowered his trusty and well-beloved Arthur, fifth Earl of Grassthorpe, and Elspeth Steele, of Winterbourne, to engage in matrimony at any time and in any place whatsoever; whereby the said marriage should be in all respects valid, and issue thereof legitimate.

CHAPTER X.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR INTERRUPTION.

ALTHOUGH during the day Arthur had wasted no time, and Kirton had used his best endeavours to expedite his departure, it was late in the evening before he was able to start. The Colonel packed him into the carriage, which his lordship found already encumbered with a whole host of things which the other's thoughtfulness had suggested as likely to be conducive to his comfort on the journey.

“ You will send off all those notes, won't you, Kirton ? I cannot have it said that I have gone away without paying my debts of honour. I regret that I am compelled to leave you in such sorry muddle ; but I know

you will keep an eye on things during my absence."

"Your lordship may depend upon every one of the notes being delivered to-night, and on the conduct of your affairs being discharged to the best of my poor ability while you are away."

Arthur shook his friend's hand warmly. Then the pent-up excitement of the day found vent in a few feverish but earnest words.

"Kirton, you are a good man and a gentleman, and I have been a damned villain. Drive on, you fellows," he concluded; then the coach rolled and rattled over the uneven stones of the dimly-lit streets, away into the darkness which lay upon the country road.

Arthur lay back in the carriage with no companion save his own thoughts, and with such company he could have dispensed with pleasure. All through the day he had

successfully contrived to avoid thinking ; in the noisy whirl and clatter of business the task had been a comparatively easy one ; but here, in the dark, the past, the present, and the future, sprang up, taking bodily shape, and crowded in upon him. Eagerly the cold-eyed spectres questioned him, and when by a superlative act of will he would have shut down the lid of reflection, they thrust skinny fingers into the aperture and forced open the casket. The time had come when he must make acquaintance with himself. Helplessly he resigned himself to the situation. Yes, he had been a fool, and perfidious. His parting words to Kirton had uttered themselves, and they were none the less true in that they were so eminently uncomplimentary. In the whole world of experience nothing humiliates, even a good man, like introspection. Look which way he would, the spectacle of himself was disgusting ; and in a little while Arthur lived a

long time, making age. By-and-by, the vision of Elsie's great, confiding love, wrought its spell on the turgid waters of this man's retrospect, and gradually an explicable, solar light—not imaginary, as the history of every worst human at his best proves—transfigured his countenance, telling that the materialist and the sensualist were dying, and the upper faculties of the man were awakening to activity. Passion's darkness was passing, love's morning tinged the east. Slowly, one by one, the reproachful faces dissolved into the night whence they sprang, and instead came whispered words that perhaps he might even yet be another man, and with the strains of this gentle music in his ears he sank to sleep.

Arthur was a sound sleeper, and being over-tired would have slept comfortably until awakened by the pangs of hunger but for an unfortunate incident which occurred when, for the second time, the stage stopped for a

change of horses. Here he was disturbed by the postilion thrusting his head in at the window and demanding what was to be done.

"Done!" ejaculated Arthur, sleepily, "go on, to be sure, and with as much speed as may be. No, I don't want anything, man; drink it up yourselves."

"'Tain't that; there ain't no 'orses."

"What!" yelled our hero, now thoroughly awake and sitting bolt upright. "Where are we? What do you mean? What time is it? Oh, give them what they ask, only get on!"

"I tell your lordship there ain't no 'orses, 'cept one as is sprained in his off-hind leg."

"But this is a posting-house, isn't it?" inquired Arthur, angrily.

"Well, so 'uns called," said the man, scratching his head.

"Go on to the next house, you booby."

"There ain't one for a good twelve mile,

and these here 'uns be dead beat ; there ain't another mile o' travel in all four on 'em."

"Go and fetch the landlord," returned Arthur ; " I'm not going to stand this."

In due time the host appeared, and was profuse in his apologies, at the same time that he was none the less secretly rejoiced at Arthur's dilemma ; he could not in any case lose the posting job, and in addition he would, for one night, at least, have an unexpected guest to fleece ; under these circumstances he could afford to be obsequious and bear with equanimity the torrent of abuse with which Arthur greeted his attempts at explanation. Yet, in sooth, the man had a good enough case : his lordship, the bishop, from the castle hard by, had that very evening departed for town with his retinue, which required for their conveyance sixteen of the landlord's horses, for bishops were bishops in those days, and, remembering what was due to their dignity, always travelled in state,

unlike their brethren of to-day, who do not disdain to use the secular hansom, the plebeian knife-board, or even the penny steamboat, when visiting the palace of their archbishop in an age when men have learned and hold that bishops were made for men and not men made for bishops. It is true that the stables were not absolutely empty, but every horse, with the exception of the sprained beast aforementioned, had been bespoke by a great nobleman whom the landlord referred to with much circumspection, and who, at the present time, was partaking of a bottle of wine before proceeding on his journey to London.

“Where, and who is he, man, quick? I’ve no time to lose. If he is a nobleman, as you say, I make no doubt but that he will oblige me when he understands that my business is pressing.’

On this score the landlord entertained his own opinions.

“Who is it?” Arthur reiterated, seeing the man’s hesitation.

“His lordship is his Grace the Duke of Bancaster.”

“’Oons, the devil! Well, it can’t be helped,” springing from the chaise; “where is he?”

“His Grace is in the coffee-room, my lord, where there is an excellent sea-coal fire. I wished to make ready a private apartment for him, but he would not brook the delay. One shall be made ready for your honour immediately,” continued the garrulous landlord, with easy volubility, as he followed Arthur into the house.

Now, if there was one conceivable circumstance more distasteful than another to our hero it was the necessity of risking the refusal of a favour at the hand of his sometime rival the Duke of Bancaster. But its distastefulness could not for a moment deter Arthur from taking his chance; he was, how-

ever, totally unprepared for the sight which met his gaze when he burst into the coffee-room, a spectacle, it must be confessed, calculated to cool the enthusiasm of an older moralist than Arthur.

At the head of a long table which occupied the centre of the sanded floor lolled his Grace of Bancaster, in an arm-chair, in the early picturesque stage of drivelling imbecility; on his right, bearing unmistakable traces of *ennui*, sat the Paquita, in a state of disagreeable drunkenness; night travelling did not agree with the temper of the fair ephemera, who existed for the time being, at least, under protest. Arthur's abrupt entrance interrupted her in the middle of a yawn, which had already been spoiled by a hiccup, which combined circumstances were enough to try the patience of even a more long-suffering lady than Paquita.

Ranged in varied attitudes around this worthy couple were three or four of his lord-

ship's gentlemen henchmen and his chaplain in ordinary, all in that mood of easy familiarity which marks a stage when the bottle or two has developed into the bottle or six, except the aforesaid domestic chaplain, who was sound asleep and snoring an eloquent sermon.

Arthur paused at the door, uncertain how to commence.

"What, Grashthorpe! come in, gla'shee you; have shomething to drink, man; here, one of you fellows, open fresh bottle. Glad to shee him, ain't we, chuck?" questioned his Grace of Bancaster.

"No," returned the lady, "I am too tired to be glad to see anybody to-night."

"Bancaster," said Arthur, "I want you to do me a favour."

"Favour, c't'n'ly, m' boy; favour, to be shure; how mush? ask Paq-hic-ita; Paquita keeps monish; I never have any my-shelf."

"I ain't got any money," grumbled the lady, sulkily.

"It isn't money, thank you, madam," explained Arthur, with icy politeness. "Bancaster, I am on my way to the West. Believe me, my business is of the utmost moment; there are no horses here, except those you have engaged; will you oblige me by letting me have enough to horse my chaise? I daresay I could make shift with a pair."

"With all the pleashure in life; we ca' make a night of it here; wash you say, Paquita? Tell Grashthorpe you'll be pleased, my dear. Stop; shan't have horses 'less you breaksh bottle, shtap my vitals if you shall! Lan'lor'," he bawled in stentorian tones to that functionary, who, by the way, was standing at his elbow, "bring more wine. Here, lan'lor', I shay, where is that chuff? Lord Grashthorpe is going to drink with us."

In the meanwhile Paquita had succeeded in taking in the sense of Arthur's request,

and perceiving, in her drunken way that she could render herself disagreeable by refusing it, stoutly entered a protest against Bancaster's acceding thereto. Looking with floating eyes uncertainly into the face of her protector, she protested: "I must be in town by the mornin', you know I must. I'm under no obligation to Gassthorpe, if you are."

"You don' wantsh to be in town," said Bancaster; "letsh make night of 't."

"No; I won't make a night of it, and I shall go to town. I've had 'nough of this cursed hole!"

"'Nough! 'nough of this curshed hole! Gad! thought you wash 'fraid to go on a little while ago, when the post-boy told you that Blue Bob wash on the roads."

"I tell you I'm goin' on. I'd rather meet Blue Bob or even the devil himself than I'd do anything to 'blige that tallow-faced putt. He's in a great hurry, he is."

“Shertenly, my dear,” broke in Bancaster, who was in that condition of maudlin amiability which believes in agreeing with the last speaker. “Shorry you can’t have horses, Grashthorpe ; have glash wine.”

“Oh, yes, he’s in a great hurry,” continued the lady, “to go an’ make a fool of some other woman like he wanted to of me.”

“You drunken ——!” roared Arthur, who was blazing with anger. Then remembering himself, he turned on his heel, after dashing to the ground the cup of wine which the landlord was presenting to him, and strode out of the room.

Seeing that there was nothing else to be done, Arthur ordered his chaise to be taken into the yard and the horses stabled until they were fit to be driven the next stage, and then gloomily gave himself up to the tedium of a night’s wait. In the room below he could hear the drunken din of the most noble Duke and his satellites, and as the

night wore on the shrill sounds of a woman's voice in high altercation floated up to him as he sat discontentedly staring at the black darkness without the uncurtained window.

At daybreak Arthur roused the house and insisted upon proceeding ; but it was nearly eight o'clock before the post-boys, who had been regaling themselves at his expense over night, would consent to make a start.

CHAPTER XI.

A PITIFUL VENGEANCE.

BEFORE Arthur entered the chaise, he told the post-boys to use their best speed ; but it was more as a matter of custom than as an earnest of their intention that they replied, " Ay, ay," for they jogged and jolted along neither faster nor slower than usual, and their pace, it must be confessed, suited Arthur's mood better than the greater speed to which he urged them.

Although equally anxious to arrive at Winterbourne as quickly as might be, he had lost the feverish impatience which had characterised him ever since he had promised Kirton to return to Winterbourne. He could look at the manors and farms as he

passed on his way with an interest as pleasant as it was novel. Before him there lay an indefinite vista of quiet, country life, to which he looked forward with the content of a new-born philosophy. His career as a man about town was closed, and to his great surprise the remembrance of it made him shudder. He recognized that if he could go back to it he would not. His financial affairs were certainly in a bad way, but he had, nevertheless, enough left to enable him to lead the life of a country squire, and even to keep up, in an unostentatious manner, the dignity of the peerage. He made up his mind that as soon as Elsie should be sufficiently recovered, they would go to the unpretentious country seat he had inherited from his father. Grassthorpe, he thought, would, for a long time to come, be too expensive a place to contemplate as a residence; he must live as economically as his position would allow, until he had cleared

off the encumbrances with which his brief flutter in town had saddled his estates, and, above all, he must pay off the loan which Kirton's generosity, at no small cost to himself, as Arthur well knew, had placed at his disposal. He recognized that a life of rural seclusion would be entirely to his wife's taste. No doubt she would be able to hold her own with sufficient ease—being a woman—in whatever society she might be placed; but for the present, at least, it would be kinder to her, as it was imperative for him, to lead a retired life. She would gradually make acquaintance with the women and families of the squires in the neighbourhood, and so acquire by degrees the tone of that society in which she would ultimately be called upon to take her place as the Countess of Grassthorpe. For himself there would be the quarter sessions and the whole round of country sport. He would become his own agent, and learn the noble art of farm-

ing. Full of this laudable intent, he stared at every cow and pig and horse he passed, overwhelming the landlords of all the change houses at which they stopped with inquiries of the most miscellaneous description, into the prices of stock and the condition of agriculture generally.

Then his thoughts wandered to the child that was coming—his child. He speculated as to its sex, and settled in his own mind that it must be a boy, fervently hoping that whichever it was it might be like its mother ; for by this time his distrust of the male Crosbys would have satisfied even the Lady Grassthorpe herself.

By a law of association, occult enough to elude his understanding, the thought of his child's mother suggested his own aunt—the only mother he had ever known, as his own had died at his birth. Lady Grassthorpe, he knew, would be none too well pleased that he had so far forgotten the traditions of the

family as to marry the daughter of a burgher ; but if his wife bore him a son to carry on the line, she would condone his folly and forgive the mesalliance, and once she had seen Elsie, Arthur felt confident of the result. He knew she would like Elsie, for everybody must like her. These thoughts of his aunt awakened him to the fact that a solitary life in the gloomy dower-house at Grassthorpe must be particularly distasteful to a lady who, all through her life, though it might have been chiefly passed in remote country places, had nevertheless been one especially distinguished for restless activity in political intrigue, and whose house, during her husband's lifetime, had never been free from the enemies of the court.

“ Hang it all,” he muttered to himself, “ we'll ask the old lady to make her home with us. No, that won't do. Pest ! she is too proud for that. I have it : she shall come and stay with us, and then if she can tear

herself away from the attractions of the baby, well, we'll let her go, that's all. And Kirton—Kirton always liked a country life—gad, he shall come too! He'll like Elsie, I know. Heigh-ho, I wish we were out of this hilly country; this chaise seems positively to crawl."

And so the day wore on till the cold daylight dwindled into colder starlight. As they came amongst the Wessex Downs the snow was lying deep, so that the chaise could make but slow progress, and Arthur became anxious lest after all he should be compelled to pass another night without achieving the object of his journey. To make matters worse, at the last change-house he had only been able to procure a pair of horses for his chaise; there was, however, a third in the stable which Arthur ordered to be saddled, and scrawled a brief note to the Rev. Mr. Crossthwaite, begging of that gentleman immediately on receipt of this to attend for

the purpose of marrying him, Arthur, fifth Earl of Grassthorpe, to Elspeth Steele, in accordance with the special license granted by his grace the Archbishop of Canterbury, which he was bearing with him. This note he despatched by the hand of a messenger, with instructions to spare neither whip nor spur in its delivery. Then he resigned himself contentedly to the slow progress of the chaise. The mounted messenger was soon out of sight, and the unbroken line of the glistening snow-covered road stretched in front of them.

The chaise was going uncertainly from side to side down the long hill which forms the eastern approach to Winterbourne. The horses chafed and started as, held up on the one hand by the postilion, and borne down by the sliding of the heavy vehicle behind them on the other, they sat back in the breechings and went nervously. When about half way down the hill a break occurred in

the trees on the left-hand side of the road, and through the gap Arthur discerned at a little distance a light which shone from a house.

“At last,” he murmured, as he craned his neck from the window; “yonder must be Winterbourne; yet stay, we have some distance further to go; that must be Rose’s farmhouse at what’s-the-name-of-the-place. Gad! he’s one of Elsie’s people,” and the sudden recollection that Elsie had “people” caused him hastily to withdraw his head. “I suppose I shall be cousin to half the people in the township by this time——”

Bang! “What was that?”

A moment, and Arthur sprang from the carriage.

A masked footpad was dimly visible by the roadside; the near horse had been shot, and was struggling in the death agony; the form of the postilion, in full retreat, was just discernible beyond the hedge, and before he

had had time to fully take in the situation, Arthur recognized that the footpad was hastily reloading his blunderbuss. To dart forward and close with him was the work of a moment. In the struggle which ensued the mask fell from the face of the footpad.

“My God! Tyler!” cried Arthur.

Something flashed past his eyes, and the next thing he knew was that he had received a blow which left a curious sensation in his right side.

Instinctively Arthur dropped his hand upon the spot where he had felt the blow descend, and thrust forward his left arm as if to keep his adversary at a distance. Seizing it with both his hands, Tyler flung him to the ground, then broke into a fiendish laugh. Arthur was mad with rage, but found himself helpless to rise. A second effort proved more successful, and he had almost staggered to his feet when a blow in the face from the blacksmith's fist felled him again to earth.

“Just in time, Master Crosby, just in time, your lordship—beggin’ yer parden. Thy messenger’s fetched the parson, but mayhap he’d ha’ bin o’ more service to ’ee here. I’ll none finish ’ee, thou’lt bleed to death all right and comfortable like an’ thou liest still, an’ if thou doesn’t thou’lt e’en bleed to death all the same. It be a main lonely road, so none will disturb ’ee, I warrant me. Thou canst think o’ the lass thou’st brought to shame lyin’ yonder i’ Rose’s farmhouse, where she wor taken on the night as her father turned the scarlet wench out on his house. Ay-y! but it were a bitter night,” he chuckled, as he gleefully rubbed his hands together, “but I has my thanksgivin’ that her didner die that night, but that the mercy o’ heaven kept her alive to bear thy bastard child an’ fill up the cup o’ my revenge. Ho—ho—ho!” he laughed, “a martel to do there’ll be i’ neighbour Steele’s house i’ the morning, when he finds out how nigh he wor to havin’ an earl

for a son-i'-law an' his shameless daughter made an honest woman on."

By this time Arthur had bled so profusely that he swooned. Kneeling over the prostrate body, Tyler put his knuckles to the brow, already chilled, and placing his huge hand over the heart, failed to detect any movement, or sign of life.

With an avaricious gleam in his little eyes, he turned the rigid body over to discover the wallet upon which it had fallen.

At that moment a breath of wind bore to him, as he fancied, the sound of approaching footsteps, and he paused.

"I mun get away from this," he muttered ; "they mun bring the body to me on the morrow an' I'll get the money then, I warrant me. 'Twill be grand to be sitting on the bench to find out how 'en came to 'en's end. I'll drag all Steele's shame to the light o' day. Woa, woa!" he said to the horse, which was endeavouring to kick itself

free from such close proximity to its dead companion. "I might take 'en wi' me," he mused; "'tis a shame to let the poor beast kick itself to pieces, an' 'tis worth a goodish bit. But I'd better let 'en bide; to kill a man bain't so much, but stealing a horse be a hangin' matter."

Then slinking through the hedge he struck across the fields to Winterbourne.

* * * * *

When Arthur recovered semi-consciousness, he experienced considerable difficulty in realizing what had happened, but attempting to move reminded him somewhat. He was vaguely aware that the night was cold and that he was strangely weak. Passing his hand across his eyes as if to clear away the film which beclouded them, he noticed that it felt wet and sticky, then saw that it had blood upon it, and the sight sickened him so that he had fainted again but for a sharp pain in his right side. Putting his

left hand across his body, his fingers closed upon something in the right hand pocket of his coat, and rolling a little on his left side, he drew forth a parchment, the stiff corner of which had been digging into the spot where he felt the pain. Holding it close to his eyes, he discerned that it was the license, and at sight of it the whole truth rushed back upon him. Pressing it to his lips he kissed it passionately, and holding it up against his breast, he began painfully to drag himself along the snow in the direction in which he remembered to have seen the light. He must go on, was the thought that sounded in his ears like the clanging of an iron-tongued bell. And so on he went, now struggling to his knees and crawling thus until the trickling wound prostrating him once more compelled him to stop and set his teeth to bear its throbbing. Then on again for a few more yards ; God ! they seemed like miles, and the moments like years.

CHAPTER XII.

RESCUED.

WHEN Samson had told his story to the priests, seated by the fire in the little room which in so short a time had come to wear quite a home-like look in his eyes, and had received due mead of congratulation upon the success of his mission, the good fathers turned their attention to the lad himself, and were minute in their inquiries as to who and what he was, and what were his movements and prospects.

“Are you going back to Winterbourne, or do you propose seeking employment in London?” questioned the superior; “in the latter case we may be able to help you.”

“’Tis like you might,” said Samson; “you

do seem to be main wonderful people, an' know a'most folks ; but 'tis like this'en : I wor bound to saddler Steele for seven year. I minds signin' them indentures well ; 'twor just at the beginnin' o' harvest, six year ago ; Uncle Hezekiah he stood as it might be there were you be sittin' ; he wor my guardian, he wor, till he died, an' master Steele he stood t'other side o' the table, an I stood a'tween 'em ; aye, but I did feel a turmut-head, an' master Chowley, who were mayor the very next year afore master Tyler, he sot in a chair wi' a high back an' arms to't up on a sort o' platform, an' he spoke to me that kind, he did, he might ha' been my father. ' Thomas Samson,' he say, ' you be a good lad,' says he, ' an' do thy duty, for that do bring a man peace at the last, you do right by master Steele an' he'll do right by you, for he's a good man, 'tis so ! ' An' he ha' been a good master to me has saddler Steele, an' I ha' done as right by he, in a manner o' speakin',

as I could. I ha' tried to at least, masters, though I bean't, so to put it, a clever 'un."

"Then, I take it, you are not out of your time until next harvest?"

"Well," said Samson, "I bean't rightly sure about that 'en; I asked 'en to gie me a holiday like, an' he wouldner, though I told 'en I'd make it up to 'en four times over when I come out o' my time, so, seein' as he wouldner gie me a holiday I just comed away, so to speak it. You see, masters, I couldn't rightly tell 'en what I wor coming for, or he'd a clapped me i' the stocks, he be that hard on Miss Elsie, poor lass. I ha' broken my indentures, 'tis clear, an' I be a runaway 'prentice, there aint no denyin' on't. He's no call to take me back, that I well knows; but whether I did ought to go back to 'en don't seem rightly plain to me. What do 'ee think?"

"Clearly, my son, you are liable to serve out the rest of your term if your master

wishes it. Your duty is to go back ; I would that I could see it were otherwise."

" But," said the younger man, addressing Samson, " I take it you can be punished for running away ; although if your master were a right thinking man he should rather be anxious to reward you for the service you have done him."

" Aye," assented Samson, " he be a right thinking man, as do allus say his prayers an' do hold the money-plate at the door under the tower, quarter come and quarter go. Oh, yes, he be a right thinkin' man, there bean't no manner o' question about that."

" Doubtless," returned the superior gravely, although a keen observer might have detected a slight upward curve of the corners of his mouth.

" Aye," Samson went on, " I knew 'ee'd think so ; but his right thinkin' makes 'en martel firm willed and above a bit hard on them as don't do right by 'en to 'en's thinkin'.

He said as how he'd clap me i'the Bridewell if I went away wi'out his leave, and I do believe he'd be as good as 'en's word."

"Is there any way in which we could be of service to the lad?" questioned the younger in a deferential undertone of his superior. "Perhaps when my lord is married, this honest fellow's master may be led to view his conduct in a different light."

"Would you like to stop here for a few days while we communicate with your master?" asked the superior.

"Aye," said Samson, "I should like 'en, rarely; there be a mort o' things i' Lunnon I ain't seen yet; but ye thinks I ought to go back to my master, don't 'ee?"

"Of that there can be no doubt."

"Then if I mun go, I'll go now," returned Samson firmly. "It 'ud be his time as I wor wastin' i' Lunnon, and I wonner do any more wrong by 'en. He's been a good master to me, I owns to it, an' if 'en breaks

my 'dentures, why he breaks 'en, an' that's all. Though what I be to do if he do break 'en I knows no more than a babe unborn. Ye've been main kind to me, masters, an' I says God bless 'ee, and thank'ee for 't. I'd like to bide wi'ee a bit, but I mun go, an' there's the end on't."

"You are quite right, you should go, and at once; we were wrong to mistrust the providence which has hitherto sped you on your way. It was in the path of duty that you left your master, and in that path you will be sustained."

"I do hope so, in mercy," said Samson; "but some o' the poor folk i' Bridewell as has no friends to take' em aught be most starved."

"We have means of communicating with your master, and do not think you need to fear the Bridewell. If he should break your indentures you may return to us."

"'Tis good intentioned on thy part," re-

turned Samson dubiously ; “ but I bean’t sure how I’ll keep body and soul together till I gets back to Winterbourne, much less up to Lunnon again. I had to borrow nigh on three pound from Mattie, our serving-wench, what she’d laid by agin her goin’ to church, an’ it rumbles my innards when I thinks o’ how long she mun wait for it. Well, masters, I mun set off, that’s for sure.”

“ Do you propose returning by the coach or the stage waggon ? ” queried the younger priest.

“ Nay, I ha’ no money for it, I mun walk ; ’twill take me a matter o’ a week, for the roads be martel heavy, an’ I bean’t i’ the best o’ fettle for walkin’ ; missus allus did say I wor the biggest ’odrotted walker she knew. An’, lor, what a mask o’ muck I’ll be in afore I gets whoam.”

“ How much would you require to go back by the coach ? ” asked the superior.

“ A sight o’ money,” replied Samson ; “ I

dun rightly know, so to put'en, for I walked to Salisbury, an' nigh on three days it took me to do 'en."

A brief conversation ensued between the two priests, then the younger left the apartment, and in the course of a few minutes returned with a small package, which he handed without a word to his superior.

"Here," said the latter, "is enough to pay all your expenses on your way back. You may consider it a debt to us if you wish, to be repaid at your convenience. The coach for Salisbury starts in about an hour ; until then rest here, some food shall be sent to you, and we must now say farewell ; mass is about to be celebrated ; we will remember you in our prayers."

Then with a silent benediction they left him alone.

Samson opened the packet which the priest had put in his hand, and found therein enough money for his journey, and if he were

careful, what would suffice to repay Mattie what she had lent him.

“Well,” said the apprentice, speaking aloud in his bewilderment, “I never did rightly know what priests were, in a manner o’ puttin’ ’en, an’ I bean’t none too sure as I be clear yet ; but I do know as they be main kind-hearted folk, and if I hears any Winterbourne chap speak bad on ’em agin I’ll fight him till my breeches bust ; aye, an’ he be as big as Phil Rose hissen, dom me if I won’t.”

Then he ate his meal in haste, and departed, fearing lest he should miss the coach.

It need hardly be said that Samson had ample time. These were the days of leisure, when nobody hurried and everybody allowed themselves a wide margin of so cheap a commodity as time ; the days when a woman of fashion did not begrudge a whole morning spent in the dressing of her

hair, and a whole afternoon devoted to sitting upon the same spot in the exact position in which her perruquier had left her for fear of disarranging the marvellous structure ; days when a man was content to devote a life-time to the writing of an elaborate treatise about nothing, with a title-page containing as much matter as would suffice for a chapter in a modern novel, or of a prolix chapter of an unimportant genealogical disquisition commenced by his great grandfather nearly a century before—days when life to the squirearchy was one stupendous yawn in an atmosphere of dreary *ennui* that would have killed Peter Bell the Third himself.

The apprentice was somewhat rewarded for his long wait before the coach started, as he got a seat immediately behind the driver, and sufficient space, so that he had every prospect of a more pleasant journey back ; and, indeed, as far as Salisbury he had

nothing to complain of. He had been successful in his mission, and on that score his heart was light; it is true that serious misgivings beset him as to his reception by the saddler, but even these were mitigated by the firm faith he had in the power of his friends the priests. And, moreover, at the change-house, where the coach stopped for the night, he obtained a bed, and the first really good night's rest he had enjoyed since leaving.

At Salisbury he had to wait an hour or more after the spick-and-span coach had bowled out of the yard on its way to the West, till the clumsy stage-waggon, which was to convey him to Warehampton Priors, which was its nearest point of approach to Winterbourne, got under way.

From this point in his journey his progress was less satisfactory; the roads were so heavy that even with the addition of a couple of horses the waggon could barely make its

traditional five miles an hour, added to which he had to walk up all the hills, ever and anon being called upon to assist in forcing the lumbering vehicle through the heavy snowdrifts. The cold, too, was intense, and the tilt-covered wain was little better than a funnel through which the cutting east wind poured in a continuous stream. The inns, too, which formed the change-houses were little else than roadside hovels, where scantiest provision was made for the comfort of the traveller.

So Samson was heartily glad, when, at length, long after darkness had set in, the waggon reached the hamlet of Warehampton Priors, when he got down to complete the remaining five miles of his pilgrimage on foot. Although his journey had been more expensive than he had hoped, for, despite his London experience, Samson had still an unlimited and refreshing faith in the purchasing power of a crown, he could not

resist the temptation of a parting glass with the driver at the inn.

Then he set out on his lonely walk.

When he had done about half the distance he came upon a strange sight. A post-chaise, empty and deserted, stood in the middle of the road.

“ Like there’s been an accident ; ’tis a bad night for sich,” he said to himself as he drew nearer.

His surprise was no whit lessened upon finding that one of the horses lay dead in the snow, and that the door of the chaise was wide open.

“ They be main careless folk to leave things like this. I’ll e’en shut the door. Woa ! ” he said to the struggling horse, which was still harnessed to the pole, “ woa, my pretty ; if ’ee goes on like this’en ee’ll ha’ the coach over, an’ there’ll be a pretty how-de-do. I can’t leave ’ee here to starve,

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tho' what I be to do wi'ee be more than I knows on."

So saying, Samson unharnessed the horse. When he had done this he caught sight of some marks in the snow, which he mistook for something that had fallen from the coach; stooping down to examine it, he found that it stained his hands, and slowly realized that it was blood.

"Well, there's been a martel bad accident, surely," he continued, as he followed the dark trail in the snow from a spot where the ground was trampled and torn as if by a struggle. "It would appear like as if there'd been a fight; but where be the fighters? Hullo, 'praps this be one on 'em. Oons, but he's been badly hurt, for sure," he exclaimed as he bent down to examine the prostrate form of a man who was lying on his face, stark, and to all appearance, dead.

"Lord i' heavens above us! it be Master Crosby," he cried, as he turned the figure

over, "an' he be dead! Oh, Miss Elsie! Oh, my poor lass!" and as he saw the stained clothes covering the rigid limbs, he continued, "he's been murdered. Oh, if there were but a moon that I might see someut about it! But 'en bean't dead yet; dead men don't bleed, as I've heard tell. Noa, 'en bean't dead," he cried, joyfully, as a low moan broke from the prostrate figure; "aye, what can I do? I ha' it; I'll e'en gie 'en a drop o' the stuff they calls brandy, as them blessed world-without-end priests gave me. Now, I had a meant to save that for Mattie and John to taste. Lord, what a mercy I didna' drink en when I wor that cold i' the waggon."

So saying, he extracted the cork from the little phial and poured the contents down Arthur's throat.

In a few moments Arthur opened his eyes. "Elsie" was the one word that escaped from his lips.

“Aye, thank God thou bean’t dead, Master Crosby. Don’t ’ee try to say nought, I knows what ’ee wants. I’ll put ’ee on the horse,” he continued ; “ we be a’nigh the farm-house, an’ Ill take ’en there. Mistress Rose be a good-hearted body, tho’ her will talk a bit plain to me like about the muck I’ll be making. Why, there bean’t no horse,” he exclaimed, in dismay, which was true, for the post-horse had taken a mean advantage of Samson’s back being turned, and had started off in the direction of home.

“ Well, ’ee can’t walk, that’s for certain, an’ if I pulls ’ee along belike thou’lt leave every drop o’ thy blood on the road as we goes. No, there’s nought for it but to carry ’en.”

So saying, he lifted the almost insensible man and carried him, staggering under the burden like a drunken man, down the road, along the lanes, and through the yard, till he laid him down inside the porch of Hockley Farm.

CHAPTER XIII.

“UNTO YOUR LIVES’ END.”

WITHIN the farm-house at Hockley there reigned that solemn stillness which comes twice in every life-time; before a man is born into the world and when he goes hence.

In the parlour Phil was sitting alone, nervous, yet listless, alert and disconsolate, before a table on which was spread with punctilious precision the baked meats always prepared in honour of the momentous occasions already alluded to. The rest of the house was given up to the woman-kind, who were flitting hither and thither, scurrying up and down the staircase, in and out the various rooms, and talking together

in low, hurried whispers. Every now and again the stillness of the house was broken by the low moans of a woman in pain. Elsie, Mrs. Rose had explained to Phil, had been hanging a curtain at her bedroom window, and had got so tired that she had been compelled to lie down ; “ she would be better presently,” as, indeed, it proved, for Phil heard her come to the door of the room above and speak to his mother, and then return to the apartment, where she began pacing up and down with rapid steps.

Once and again Phil went to the window, and throwing back the shutter, looked out into the darkness, listening disconsolately to the wind as it shrilled around the corner of the barn and rumbled in the chimney.

“ ’Tis a bitter night ; ’tis a fearsome night ! Aye, but it be nigh as bad as t’other night when she came here, poor lass.”

He was about turning from the window after one such reverie when a sound of foot-

steps crunching the snow fell upon his ears. He opened the door to save the noise of the knock, and found himself face to face with the rector of the parish.

“Lor’, Mr. Crossthwaite, thou out i’ such a night !”

“Good evening, Rose ; has the Earl of Grassthorpe arrived ?”

“What ? Who ? begging your pardon ; but who did ’ee say. Won’t ’ee come in, sir ? the wind do blow martel cold into the house.”

“Thank you,” said Mr. Crossthwaite, as he entered. “I expected to have found his lordship here,” he continued, as he divested himself of his cloak. “He sent me a summons to meet him.”

“Who was it you said ?” repeated Phil.

“The Earl of Grassthorpe.”

“It mun be a mistake, I be thinkin’. What should ’en be wantin’ here ? I never heard on’en, not to my knowing.”

“He informed me in his letter that he held a license from our good Lord Archbishop, empowering him to marry Elspeth Steele, and directing me to be in readiness to obey the mandate at once. Knowing that the poor girl was here, I judged it best to come forthwith.”

“Earl of Grassthorpe! ye mun mean Master Crosby. Oh—h, perhaps it be he; he were allus a main strange gentleman. Well! gollies; but this be a rum go!”

“I know nothing of the matter beyond what I have told you; and, with your permission, I will remain here until his lordship arrives?”

“I shall be much honoured by thy company; but, dang me, savin’ your reverence’s presence, if I can make’en out.”

So saying, Phil led the way into the parlour, and begged his guest to be seated. Mr. Crossthwaite was nothing loth to partake of the strong waters which Phil offered him.

"'Tis good Nantz," he said condescendingly. "I don't know that I have better in the rectory cellar."

"Mayhap it comes from the same place," suggested Phil awkwardly.

"What—mayhap it does, mayhap it does ; but, there, 'tis common in these parts."

"Aye," said Phil, "an' I for one can see no harm in't."

"Who art jabbering to there, lad ? I should ha' thought thou would ha' had more sense, and the lass lyin'—Mr. Crossthwaite, sir, what art doing out such a night ?" asked Mrs. Rose abruptly. On hearing the sound of voices, she had come to enjoin the necessity of quiet.

When Mr. Crossthwaite had explained, Mrs. Rose was as much astonished as her son had been.

"Earl of Grassthorpe ! I knows no such man, nor does my Phil, to my knowin'. I ha' moiled an' sweated to keep'en a decent

man, and he knows nought of that swearin’, swaggerin’, rakehelly lot.”

“Come, come, my good woman, you are not in a schism shop, and I may not listen to such gabble. ’Tis little less than blasphemy. I’ll have you remember I am a justice of the peace.”

“Aye,” said Mrs. Rose, “and thou comest to a house where thou art not wanted thou mun e’en put up wi’ the talk on’t. An’ thou wert a bishop and a judge to boot, it gives ’ee no right to come into an honest man’s house wi’out as much as by-your-leave, and then dictate what they mun say. Not but what thou art welcome, and the house be honoured by thy company ; but I will say——”

“Sh! mother,” broke in Phil. “I’m thinkin’ that this Earl o’ Grassthorpe be none other than Master Crosby hissen.”

“The Lord grant it!” ejaculated Mrs. Rose fervently. “I’ll go and tell Elsie,” she added, moving towards the door.

“Stop, mother, thou mun none tell the lass ; we may be i'the wrong, and she'll do nought but fret if it should be all a cock-and-bull story.”

“Aye, lad, maybe thou art right, though I'd dearly love to tell her ; she'll be sadly i'want o' comfort afore the mornin', poor lass,” she added, under her breath. Then aloud she continued, “I wonder when he will be here.”

“I am surprised,” said Mr. Crossthwaite, “that his lordship has not already arrived, though, doubtless, he would stop before finishing his journey to partake of such poor refreshment as the change-house could afford him.”

“Aye, men be all alike, wi' her a lyin' up above sufferin' he can be takin' en's ease and enjoyin' en's victuals. I've no patience wi'en.”

“Do you know if his lordship is informed of Elspeth Steele's present whereabouts ?

Perchance he has gone on to Winterbourne, expecting to find her at her father’s house, in which case he must of necessity be delayed some time.”

“Not heard that Steele had turned the wench out!” exclaimed Mrs. Rose, in contemptuous surprise; “why, I’d ha’ thought everybody ’ud ha’ heard on’en by this ’en.”

“Tush, tush, my good woman, you don’t suppose that the doings of an insignificant place like this serve to interest the dwellers in the world of fashion. I will wait for some time longer. I should be unwilling to disoblige a person of his lordship’s quality and influence, though for my part I protest that his conduct in this affair fails to meet with my approval; such unequal matches are not conducive to the well-being of society; they tend to lower its tone. However, it is not becoming in a man of my humble standing to question the actions of those whom it

has pleased Providence to place so far above me."

"It may be so," said Phil dogmatically ; "but to my mind a man's a man and a maid's a maid all the world over, whether they be o' the quality or not ; but 'taint for me to gainsay a scholar and a parson."

"Well," said Mrs. Rose, "I mun go back to the lass. Aye, but I would like to tell her."

With this she went out of the room, and Phil endeavoured to make up for any lack of courtesy which his speech might have betrayed by pressing more Nantz upon his visitor, who observed that although port wine was a drink more befitting the stomach of a gentleman, he always found that Nantz agreed with his constitution.

Mrs. Rose had scarcely reached the room above when the sounds of heavy footsteps were heard in the porch.

Phil started to his feet and made for the

door, when Mr. Crossthwaite, ever mindful of his dignity, interposed to remind him that it was his place to welcome his lordship. During the delay the latch of the kitchen door was lifted, and as the clergyman stepped forward with a low reverence he was confronted by the gawky figure of Mr. Steele’s apprentice.

“I ha’ found ’en, I ha’ found ’en!” he gasped; “he wor a’most dead, but, thank God, he be alive yet,” he added as he almost fell into a chair.

“Where did ’ee find ’en? Where be he?” asked Phil.

But Samson was too exhausted to speak; he could only point in the direction of the porch. The next moment Phil and the parson were gingerly lifting the half-senseless man into the kitchen; very gently they laid him on the broad seat of the high-backed settle; very tenderly Phil pushed back the matted hair from the pale, cold

brow, and wiped the oozy corners of the pain-drawn mouth.

By this time Samson had recovered and was making for the door.

“Where be goin’, man?” asked Phil;
“where be goin’?”

“To fetch t’ apothecary; he be wounded nigh to death, stuck i’ the right side.”

Then they saw, what had before escaped their attention, that Arthur’s clothes were soaked with blood.

“List ’ee here,” said Phil; “thou ’art worn out, I’ll go.”

“Nay!” cried Samson, “I be fit an’ I be goin’; do thou stay wi’ ’en; put some strong waters atween ’en’s lips an’ keep ’en goin’ till t’ apothecary comes.”

Phil dashed past Samson into the darkness, returning in a few seconds with a key in his hand.

“Take this and go down to the stable. My roan be standing i’ the stall next the

door, and the saddle be on the post beside ‘en. Ride for thy life, man!”

Samson needed no second bidding, and was gone just as Mrs. Rose reached the foot of the staircase to ascertain if this second disturbance offered any solution to the enigma of the first. Meanwhile the parson had been respectfully eyeing his lordship from a discreet distance; upon Mrs. Rose’s entrance he turned to her and said piteously, “This is a sad condition for a person of such great quality.”

“Go to, fool!” remarked the lady addressed, with didactic terseness; “why, the man’s been hurt! Mercy on us, he’s been stabbed! Here, you Phil, don’t stand gaping there, lad; run and fetch my scissors, they be on the chest i’ the linen room; we mun cut away ‘en’s clothes.” Then, turning to the parson, she snapped, “Take yon broom and go into the outhouse, man, and find some cobwebs, quick; don’t stand there like

a stucken pig ; if bean't of use i' the pulpit be o' some out on't ; sake's alive, but some folks be mortal helpless to be sure ! Bless my life, do 'ee want 'en to bleed to death ? ”

Meanwhile her deft fingers had been busy loosening the lace fall and stock from about the throat of the helpless man, bathing his forehead with vinegar and trying to force some spirits down his throat.

Phil returned with the scissors only to be despatched for linen with which to make bandages, while the good woman cut away the clothes from about the dumb, piteous lips of the wound. And from above came the sound of a moan as of one who had seen the ghastly sight and shuddered.

Arthur's eyelids fluttered, then opened, and the parchment, which he had been clutching with stiffened fingers, fell from his relaxed grasp on to the floor.

‘ Elsie ? is she here ? ’ he whispered.

Mrs. Rose, her heart too full for words, nodded her head vigorously.

Then the eyelids wearily drooped, and a contented sigh breathed itself, as it seemed from the very soul of the man.

Mrs. Rose had cleansed the wound when the Rev. Mr. Crossthwaite, looking rather the worse for his encounter with the unexplored remainders of the barn roof, re-entered, bearing quite a respectable quantity of the required cobwebs.

“Humph!” grunted the dame; “and is that all thee’s gotten after all this time? Well, well, set down the broom and bring ’en here, man.”

“Is he dead?” ventured the divine.

“Aye, he soon would be an’ if he had nought but gowks like ’ee to tend ’en.” With which ungracious reply the parson had to rest content.

While Mrs. Rose was binding the cobwebs, with which she had covered the wound, in place, Mr. Muckwaite, the apothecary,

entered, and Phil took the steaming roan to the stable.

As a matter of course, the man of medicine objected, in a professional manner, to all that had been done, although he wisely refrained from interfering, contenting himself with the administration of internal remedies of a stimulating nature, and the avowal of a determination to bleed the patient copiously next morning.

Their united efforts were presently rewarded, when Arthur opened his eyes and said, with distinctness, though weakly, "Is the parson here?"

"Yes, my lord," returned that functionary obsequiously, greatly flattered that Arthur's first inquiry, as he supposed, should be for himself.

"Where is Elsie?"

"She be above stairs," answered Mrs. Rose promptly.

"Fetch her. We must be married at

once.” Then he closed his eyes, saying to Mr. Crossthwaite, “The license is here—on the floor,” and waited while Mrs. Rose went to do his bidding.

But a little while elapsed, then the stillness was broken by a startled cry in the room above. Phil, returned from the stable, stood by the door at which he had just entered ; Mr. Crossthwaite by the table was reading the license in the flickering light of the candles ; the apothecary bent over his patient, when the door at the foot of the stairway opened, and disclosed Mrs. Rose supporting a little figure clad all in white, a fleecy shawl wrapped loosely about it.

Elsie advanced into the room, her dishevelled hair, rippling about her shoulders, framing her face—now white as alabaster, save for the hectic spot that burned on either cheek—like a glory ; her nostrils quivering and distended, her eyes shining with a light wonderful to see.

Silently with outstretched arms she suffered Mrs. Steele to assist her to the settle, then helping her to kneel, the good woman left her and went to the other side of the fire-place.

Arthur opened his eyes again as Elsie's kiss fell upon his brow, then lifting his arms he drew down her head until it nestled in his neck ; he felt her breath warmly stealing about him like conscious forgiveness, and it thrilled him ; taking her hands in his he placed them on his heart.

"Begin," he said. And the solemn words of the marriage service were read in subdued tones by the clergyman.

" : pour upon you the riches of His grace, sanctify and bless you, that ye may please Him both in body and soul, and live together in holy love unto your lives' end. Amen."

Then Mrs. Rose lifted the new made wife to her feet, and led her away.

CHAPTER XIV.

JOY COMETH IN THE MORNING.

As Samson interpreted in the most literal manner Phil's expressed wish that he should spare neither whip nor spur, the two miles of his journey to Winterbourne were accomplished in a very short time ; nor had he much difficulty in persuading the apothecary of the urgency of his mission. The next thing to be done was to relieve Mattie's anxiety ; but a glance at the many windows in the street in which lights were still shining warned him that so pleasant a task must be postponed.

"I mun leave 'un till they be abed," he muttered, "an' then get her to come to the window ; if I goes now Steele may pounce

on me, an' then if he orders me to stop, why I mun, bein' 'ens 'prentice, an' I can't bear to be kept away from Hockley to-night. The morrow 'ull be time enough for the stocks, an' he wants to send me to 'em. I mun bide i' the dark for a bit."

Then he remembered that a crime had been committed, and that it was necessary that the hounds of justice should be put on the track of the transgressor.

"I'll e'en go an' tell Tyler; if he ha' gotten aught agin me I mun gie'en the slip, that's all; 'sides as he ain't friends like wi' Master Steele, mayhap he'll be for lettin' me off."

So, threading the back alleys, he managed to arrive at the blacksmith's house unobserved. He knocked at the door. "Come in," cried a voice he recognized as Hetty's. Samson tried, but the door was fast. Then the bolts were withdrawn and the girl appeared.

“Samson, is it thou? I’m glad to see thee safe back again. Father must have fastened the door; ’tis strange of him.”

Hetty’s surprise is explicable by the fact that it was most unusual in Winterbourne at that time for doors to be fastened, partly because so doing would imply a lack of hospitality, and partly because robbery was an all but unknown quantity.

“Aye, I ha’ come back,” said Samson. “Lord, never was such a time as I ha’ seen; and money, why it ha’ melted as it might be from a pitcher wi’ a hole in’t, like.”

“Yes, yes,” interrupted Hetty impatiently; “but what about Mr. Crosby?”

“I ha’ gotten ’en back; I found ’en lyin’ i’ the road, and took he to Hockley. He be more dead than alive. He’s been bad hurt, so I be come to tell Master Tyler on’en.”

“But he won’t die?” questioned the girl hastily.

“Well, I dun rightly know; anyhow,

they'll be married first. Parson wor a-waitin' for 'en, ready-like; I can't make it out in a manner o' puttin' it. But where be thy father, Hetty? I mun see 'en, and then get back."

"Gone to bed, I think; but come in, Samson, I'll call him down."

"Nay, I be all of a-muck," replied the wily Samson, mindful that it would be much easier to give the mayor leg-bail from the vantage ground of the threshold than from within doors, should it prove necessary to do so.

Presently Tyler appeared.

"Well, my runaway 'prentice, hast come to seek my help i'runnin' thy neck into the noose? I'll clap 'ee i' Bridewell wi' all the pleasure i' life," blustered the mayor, in a very loud tone of voice, and with an excited manner which caused Samson to congratulate himself on his forethought in having put so safe a distance between them.

“Not to-night ’ee won’t, Master Tyler. Lord, how queer ’ee looks. Has aught happened to ’ee?”

“No, nothin’s happened to me. What do’ee want a-keepin’ honest men from their beds at hours when none but footpads an’ the like be abroad?”

“That’s e’en what there be, Master Tyler; there’s been a deed o’ blood, a deed o’ horror, so to put ’en, i’ the Hockley Road.”

“Aye, mercy on us, has there now, for sure? Who’d a thought ’en? With peaceable burgers drinkin’ comfortable drops i’ the alehouse an’ talkin’ over town affairs as good men should. Only to think on’en! Thou didst right, lad, to come to me, bean’t I mayor? Who be ’en? Where be the body? Come, come, tell me about ’en; bean’t I the magistrate?”

“’Twor Master Crosby. I picked ’en up an’ carried ’en to Hockley Farm, where they

be tendin' 'en He ha' been stuck. 'Pothecary ha' just gone on Phil Rose's mare as brought me into the town, an' the parson be there. When I found 'en I took 'en for dead. There were the chaise, an' one horse dead, an' t'other a-kickin' as if the old fiend hissen were a-lodging in his innards. 'He be e'en dead, an' somebody's killed 'en,' I says to mysen, an' then he give a groan, an' I picked 'en up an' carried 'en to the farm, and martel heavy he wor. Why, what be the matter wi 'ee?" he asked, anxiously, as his inattentive eyes at length became aware of the change which had been taking place in the blacksmith's features.

Truly Mr. Tyler was undergoing a curious transformation. He seemed to have shrunk from his great height; his erstwhile swelling cheeks were sunken; an ashen pallor, as of a ghost overtaken by the morning light overspread his countenance; his eyes, from which all lustre had faded, appeared as if

they had died of uncertainty, and in his temples were two hollows filled with a blue shadow. Only the convulsive twitchings of the mouth and nostrils, about which were hard white lines, told that the face was alive. Tottering forward he advanced upon the mute apprentice, who stood transfixed with wonder; nearer and nearer he came, but Samson stirred not nor moved; he stood riveted to the spot, absorbed in contemplation of this unlooked-for metamorphosis. This curious shambling, shrivelled creature, with palsied limbs and senseless eyes, was not Tyler? Then, ere intelligence could fling open the portal of understanding, the door was banged violently to in his face.

“Well,” said the apprentice, after some moments vainly spent in gazing blankly at the door, “to think one could be so mistook i’ a man. Lord, how he took’en to heart, an’ at hearin’ that a deed o’ blood should be done arter all his tryin’ to make this

a place of respect to all the neighbours round."

The next morning folk with horses to be shod waited about the forge ; but it was not opened all day, nor ever again, for Mr. Tyler was gone, and Winterbourne knew him no more.

* * * * *

Early hours were the order of the day in Winterbourne, and if Mattie did not go to bed with the sun that luminary had not the advantage by much. It wanted a few minutes of nine o'clock when, seated in her room, her meditations were interrupted by the concussion of something soft, like a handful of snow, flung against the window. When this had been repeated two or three times she unfastened the casement and looked out. As she did so she caught her name uttered in an eager whisper by some one below.

"Hist, Mattie, hist. Is it thou?"

“Hi, who art? What dost want? Is aught the matter?”

“’Tis me—Samson.”

“Lawks a mussy, hast seen the master? He be at the tholsel; I dare not let ’ee in, wi’out his leave, he be set agin ’ee, I tells ’ee, he be. Hast brought ’en? Where be he? The missus be takin’ on after Miss Elsie, above a bit, poor heart. Dost want aught? What art going to do? Speak, lad, quick; the master may be home anywhens.”

Samson’s powers of narration at the best of times did not err in the direction of lucidity, but with his head craned back at an acute angle with his spine, and a distance of some twenty to thirty feet betwixt himself and his questioner, Mattie was unable to make sense or reason of his unintelligible jargon. She knew that he was pouring forth a stream of words in which the names of Elsie, Arthur, the parson, the apothecary

and the mayor were mingled in hopeless confusion ; that somebody was ill, that something had happened, and that somebody might not recover from something, whirled in a mazy dance before her ; but whether the parson had wounded Arthur, or the apothecary had wounded the mayor, or Phil Rose had eloped with a post-chaise and shot a roan upon which Samson had afterwards galloped back to fetch the apothecary, she was at a loss to determine ; but that Elsie was dangerously ill and might not recover, was the one idea that crystallized itself amidst the verbal chaos.

Having discharged his mission* to the best of his ability, and ricked his neck in the process, Samson made the best of his way back to Hockley.

There was unbroken silence in the farm kitchen when Samson re-entered. The Rev. Mr. Crossthwaite, seated on the extreme edge of his chair, was busily engaged in

alternately studying the Order for Visitation of the Sick, and vigorously, if surreptitiously, rubbing his left leg, in which he had contracted a bad attack of the fidgets. Phil Rose was earnestly considering which particular pig the side of bacon hanging on the second beam to the left of the fireplace had originally graced ; while the apothecary, as became a man of science, was profoundly occupied in looking wisely into vacancy and twiddling his thumbs meanwhile ; and upon all lay that curious stillness which is usually to be observed in the presence of an unconscious man.

Samson took his seat and completed the silent quintette ; at length, catching Phil's eye, he glanced at the patient, and by means of an interrogative nod inquired as to his condition ; an interval, then Phil, succeeding in catching the eye of the apothecary, nodded at Arthur and then at Samson ; and Mr. Muckwaite conveyed the required infor-

mation to the apprentice by nodding reassuringly at all three.

At the conclusion of this piece of pantomime Mrs. Rose appeared at the foot of the stairway and speechlessly beckoned the apothecary to follow her, which, after satisfying himself as to the condition of his patient, he did.

"This is very, very sad," murmured the divine. "Rose, I shall be glad if you will give me a little more Nantz."

Phil complied, and silence once more held undivided sway.

Suddenly the kitchen door was flung open, and Mrs. Steele, followed by Mattie, rushed into the room.

"My Elsie, my pretty, where is she? Tell me? Tell me she is not dead," cried the distraught woman.

"Hush," said Phil, "she be doing well enough, so far as I know; but here be Mr. Crosby, wounded nigh to death a-comin' to make her his wife."

“His wife!”

“Aye, they were married by Mr. Cross-thwaite here an hour ago.”

“Praised be the name o’ the Lord for this mercy,” cried the good woman with unaffected piety.

Up to this point Mattie had borne herself bravely; but the news of Arthur’s timely arrival was too much, so she sat down on the nearest chair and indulged in a fit of noiseless tears.

“Calm yourself, my good creature, calm yourself,” gasped Mr. Crossthwaite. “It is not becoming you should give way before his noble lordship.”

Mrs. Steele looked round in search of the person referred to, but discovering only Arthur, Phil and the parson was reduced to inquiry: “Where be’ens noble lordship?”

“Well, d’ye see, aunt, ’tis like this ’en,” explained Phil, in an undertone. “Master

Crosby be gotten a new name like ; he be called Earl of Grass—Grass——”

“Grassthorpe, Earl o’ Grassthorpe,” said Samson, coming to his rescue.

“Sake’s alive, an’ he ha’ married our Elsie, do’st say ? ”

“Yes, madam ; such is the inscrutable dispensation of an allwise Providence,” ejaculated the divine, “that your daughter should become at once the wife and the widow of a peer ; I am even now waiting in readiness to perform the last offices. Truly, the ways of Heaven are past finding out.”

“Theed’st best go to her, aunt,” said Phil, anxious both to restore the balance of silence and to stay the flow of the parson’s eloquence.

Mrs. Steele was not slow in acting upon her nephew’s suggestion, and accompanied by the constant Mattie she ascended to the room in which lay her daughter.

The door of the apartment above had barely closed upon the saddler’s wife ere

steps were heard outside, and Phil, with a muttered "'Od drat it," went out into the porch,—Samson instinctively following, leaving the parson, to his great discomfiture, alone with the sick man.

This latest visitor to the farm was none other than the saddler himself. On his return from the meeting at the tholsel Mr. Steele had found his house deserted; in his intense bewilderment he had searched every nook and cranny, even going so far as to break open the door of his daughter's room—in his wrath not stopping to unlock it—but, needless to say, his search was unrewarded. Then in high dudgeon he set off to Hockley, assured that his wife could be nowhere else.

"Where be my wife?" he demanded roughly, of Phil.

"Upstairs wi' thy daughter."

"Aye, I thought as much; I be come to fetch her."

“Then thou’st had thy journey for nought. I tell’ee she be where thou’lt none get at her.”

“I tell ’ee I will, an’ thou’lt do well to let me enter.”

“Thou wilt none enter, I tell ’ee, uncle. The lass be i’ sad straits, an’ while she be under my roof, law or no law, thou’lt none come a’nigh aunt.”

“She be my wife ; true and lawful I married her, an’ obey me she shall ; so, an’ thou won’t let me come into thy house thou mun e’en go thysen and fetch her.”

“No, an’ I won’t do that ’en,” returned Phil ; “an’ thou has come over to Hockley a purpose, thou’lt ha’ thy pains for thy trouble.”

“I tell ’ee I will,” returned the saddler furiously, and attempting to pass Phil in the doorway ; but Phil seized him by the collar, and holding him at arm’s length, shook him until his teeth rattled in his head.

“Thou shalt none come in this house ; an’ if ’ee don’t hold thy tongue I’ll make ’ee bite ’en until ’en can’t wag.”

Thus induced to listen to reason Mr. Steele so far reconsidered his position as to request that Phil be the bearer of a message to his wife, which that gentleman, flatly refusing to do, the saddler was reduced to muttering imprecations upon everybody in general and his wife in particular.

“If ’ee ha’ no more that’s worth hearin’ to say thee had best be goin’!” suggested Phil consolingly.

“I won’t go. I’ll stop about the place till I see her, if it be mornin’ first.”

“Aye,” said Phil, “thou’lt please thyself ; but I be main sorry it be such a good night o’er head. I could wish that the snow were fallin’ an’ the wind were hustling thee like it did thy child on the night that thou did’st turn her out ! Anyway, I mun be goin’. Master Crosby be within, an’ I mun go an’

wait on him. I ha' wasted too much time wi' thee a'ready."

"Crosby, Crosby inside there, didst say? Methinks thou art well set to work a-turnin' thy house into a place o' meetin' for scarlet wenches and fly-by-nights. Curse him, and curse her, a murrain on the lot on ye, I says," roared Steele, fairly beside himself, and dancing with impotent rage. "I will get at 'en, I will get at 'en," he continued, pushing past Phil.

"None so fast, my master," remarked Samson, emerging from the gloom of the porch in which he had been hidden behind Phil and confronting him. "Thou mayest curse an' thou wilt, but thou shalt none come in here, I'll take care on that."

"Things be comin' to a pretty pass, truly," spluttered the saddler, "when a man be ordered about by his runaway 'prentice. I'll make thee smart, Master Samson, let the morrow come. I'll ha' thee put i'the Bridewell

an' whipt through the town at cart's tail, an' there be law i' the land, dom me if I don't."

"Aye, thou mun do as thou choosest, but thou dost not come in here. An' now I tell 'ee that I went up to Lunnon to fetch Master Crosby, an' brought 'en down to marry Miss Elsie."

"An' 'ens done it, too," broke in Phil triumphantly. "I be glad to thankfulness for the lass; but 'tis too good for thee, thou dom'd hoary-headed, flinty-hearted old scoundrel!"

"Wha-at!" exclaimed the saddler, overpowered by the information, "married her! What, a gentleman like that'en married my girl? Lord ha' mercy if I bean't martel flustered."

"Yes, thou cursin', cantin' hypocrite, as says thy prayers i' the mornin' an' turns thy child out at night. Thy daughter be the wife o' a nobleman. Get thee back to Winterbourne and think on't. Come in, Samson, lad, we be wanted indoors."

“Stay, Phil,” cried the saddler ; “a nobleman, didst say ? Didst say a nobleman ? ” but Phil shook himself free and went into the house.

“He said a nobleman,” repeated the man, seizing Samson in turn, “who be ’en ? ”

“The Earl o’ Grassthorpe, Master Crosby as was,” muttered Samson ungraciously.

“Lord love ’ee, Samson, lad ; Elsie, our Elsie, wife of an earl ! Lord bless ’ee for goin’, lad. I’ll be good to ’ee ; thou shalt ha’ all the holidays ’ee dost wish. I were only joking about the roundhouse, lad, I didna mean——”

“Oh, dom,” ejaculated the apprentice, going in and locking the door.

* * * * *

Hour after hour passed in silence, and, towards daybreak, a little cry from the room overhead caused the men to look quickly and intelligently at each other. The divine, who had been dozing, coughed a portentous “Ahem ” behind his hand ; then, thoroughly

aroused, yawned, shivered, and got the fidgets again.

By-and-by Phil noticed the cold grey light of morning was stealing through the chinks of the shutters. He rose and threw them open. It was a brilliant morning, and the pale winter sunlight flooded the room.

Arthur stirred in his sleep.

A creaking footstep was heard descending the stairs. Phil opened the door and met his mother, bearing in her arms a small bundle, carefully wrapped and swaddled in a mystic maze of warm and fluffy coverings.

She crossed the kitchen to the settle and bent with her burden over the prostrate figure.

Arthur opened his eyes, a wan smile lighted his placid face, he lifted his hand and rested it caressingly on the little bundle for a moment, then beckoning Samson, who approached, he said : " Take it, Elsie's child."

“ ’Tis a boy,” said Mrs. Rose, with exultation, “ an’ a fine lusty child at that. Lawk a mussy, mind ’a don’t drop ’en, Thomas Samson, thou be’est but a gowk at best.”

“ Yes, hold it carefully,” exhorted the divine ; “ remember, young man, you are privileged to hold a viscount.”

CHAPTER XV.

SOME TIME AFTER.

"That done, we shalbe safe, and good
Those beasts were cleane, that chew'd the cud!"

"AUNT GRASSTHORPE, what does this mean?"

"Bless my heart, child, how should I know; I never was bookish; it was not thought correct, when I was young, for women to read much; but times have altered. You had best ask Kirton there. I believe he has read every book which has been written. He is spoiling that child, Elsie; really, if you don't interfere, I shall; 'tis monstrous, and a great injustice to the boy."

And in truth it would appear that Colonel

Kirton was doing his best to justify the dowager Lady Grassthorpe's accusation. Little Arthur was now three years old, and a fac-simile in miniature of his mother. He and Kirton were inseparables ; from morning till night the child was either with or in search of his companion, and the Colonel had even been known to forego a day's sport rather than vex his playfellow. At present he was busily engaged in the undignified calling of a menagerie, and it was when the entertainment had reached that point at which the Colonel was personating an elephant and the child, as his keeper, was about to mount upon his back, that his great aunt had threatened to interpose.

The family party were on the lawn of Crosby House, where the Earl of Grass-thorpe, in pursuance of his intention, was making his home. His aunt was on an indefinite visit, and Kirton had been persuaded to take up his quarters there, in order

that he might enjoy that country life in which he was supposed to delight.

The Dowager and the regnant Ladies Grassthorpe were seated on a bench, in the shadow of an old gable ; the elder engaged at her interminable knitting, and the younger in endeavouring to make sense of a volume entitled, " Silex Scintillans," which had been recommended to her perusal by the parson of the parish, who was a pronounced mystic, in poetry at least, and had written various verses, copies of which had appeared, to the intense delight of his most intimate friend and appreciative reader, namely himself, in the pages of the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Arthur, stretched at full length on the grass, was reading a book, recently published by Mr. Fielding, a gentleman of good parts and family, one effect of his evident enjoyment of which was that it momentarily increased the Dowager Lady Grassthorpe's irritability, who, herself not being a bookish person as

she allowed, had small patience with people who could find amusement in such an emasculate pastime as reading.

Time had dealt mercifully with the two elder members of the group. Lady Grass-thorpe, senior, was but little altered; the restless eyes beneath the overhanging brows were as keen and piercing as when we first made her acquaintance; and with Kirton the process of ripening was progressing with advancing years. Elsie had fulfilled the promise of her girlhood, and, save for a certain matronly roundness of limb, and perhaps just a shade of sadness, telling of experience, which expressed itself about the corners of the mouth, she was still the little Elsie who had indulged such pleasant day dreams in the upper chamber whose window overlooked the meadows beyond the quiet street of Winterbourne.

Not so was it with Arthur. The Earl of Grassthorpe was not the Arthur Crosby who

had so narrowly escaped death when the falling steeple had crushed his father. And yet it would be difficult to say wherein lay the difference, saving, perhaps, that he was thoughtful and considerate where before he had been careless and cynical. He had never entirely recovered from the wound he had received on the Hockley Road, as was evinced by a certain stiffness of the right side apparent in his walk.

“Arthur, what is that waggon coming up the Avenue? I have told you times and again that such things should only be allowed to approach the house by way of the Chace. Why don’t you give the lodge-keeper orders not to allow it?”

“Confoundedly long way round for the poor beggars, aunt,” answered his lordship, turning over another page.

The old lady was about to expatiate at length upon the impropriety of the proceeding, when Elsie, starting up, exclaimed,

“Why, Arthur, here’s Samson with the harness !”

The old lady’s lips closed a little more tightly together than usual at the sound of the name of a man who had succeeded in doing that which both herself and Kirton had so signally failed to accomplish. She bent more closely over her knitting as she hastily recalled all that Kirton and Elsie had told her of the part which had been played by this most inadequate-seeming instrument.

Elsie went to meet Samson, who, at her approach, scrambled precipitately from the waggon, leaving his man to make his way to the stables as best he might.

When the pair joined the group on the lawn Arthur and Kirton greeted Samson with so much cordiality as to completely disconcert that never too self-possessed individual, so that by the time he was informed by the Dowager Lady Grassthorpe that she was proud to make his acquaintance

he could only nod his head and stammer irrelevantly that it "was a martel long journey, to be sure," and that he had never been so honoured as when he had "held 'en" in his arms ; meaning, it is to be presumed, her ladyship's great nephew.

"Sit down at once," commanded Elsie with pretty imperiousness, "and tell me all about Winterbourne."

"Samson is tired, Elsie," interposed Arthur ; "suppose you have a meal served for him before he talks."

"No, I thank 'ee, Master Crosby—I means my Lord Grassthorpe ; 'tis so hard to bring one's tongue to it, so to put 'en. Winterbourne folks allus speak on 'ee as Master Crosby. I had a bite an' a sup down there i' the village yonder, at a place wi' a three cornered thing above 'en they call thy arms, but why they should call 'en thy arms beats me. Howsumnever, if it's the same to thy lordship I'll e'en wait till thy

supper time ; 'tis not far off, I warrant me. Thy mother, I mind me," he explained to Elsie, " wor allus at me about eatin' atween meals. I'd like to get 'en off my mind, like, as soon as I may. I shall eat a sight freer an' I do. Where be I to begin ?" he added helplessly, as he sat down by the Dowager's side on the bench.

" First tell me about mother," said Elsie.

" She ha' been i' health sin you left after thy father's death nigh two year ago. She sent her love to 'ee and her duty to Master Crosby here. An' she be main comfortable up to Hockley wi' her sister an' Phil Rose. She be more silent like, but mayhap that be along o' Missus Rose, who hath an uncommon gift of speech, poor old heart."

" Do you see her often ?" questioned Elsie.

" Well, 'ee see, I did use to 'en, but I dun so much o' late. Phil ha' had powerful good luck this lambin' time. But there, thou'st heard o' that i' thy mother's letters, I makes

no doubt ; an' 'tis said by one here and there as he do talk o' sellin' his roan ; but I bean't believin' 'en, for he do set mighty store by 'en sin the night I fetched Mr. Muckwaite on 'en."

"I have no doubt of it, my friend," interposed Arthur, with a mischievous twinkle in his eye.

"'Tis so, I assure 'ee. Phil's bought a new 'en : he bought 'en at the fair at Warehampton Canoncorum, where, do 'ee mind 'en, thou didst take Miss Elsie on thy horse to the hirers' fair. Lord, to think o' the changes there's been since then !"

It was now Kirton's turn to smile, which he did discreetly whilst bending down to talk to Arthur junior.

"Have you brought all the harness ?" asked Arthur, as if desirous to change the conversation.

"Aye, I've brought 'en," returned Samson. "It most filled the waggon to overflowin'.

I allus did know as noblemen an' the like do want a sight o' harness, which 'tis in reason, but, dom me (beggin' your pardon, Miss Elsie, 'tis only my manner o' putten' 'en), if ever I'd ha' believed that any man breathin' could want such a martel deal of gear. It ha' taken me nigh on two years to do, on and off. 'Twas quite an upsettin' for me, for I got two 'prentices by it. I be main thankful to 'ee an' to the mercies, for here be I a master o' the town wi' journeymen under me, when, had thy father lived, Miss Elsie, I should ha' been but a journeyman mysen, at the best, i'stead 'o bein' e'en spoken of for the town's council. We heerd o' Tyler t'other day. He wor took on the road, so 'tis said, by one or two as knows a thing or two. I doubt me but he will be hung i' chains by this 'en. I mun look for the gallows as I go back. 'Twon't be so much out on my way, an' I'll take care thou knowst, Master Crosby, how it be."

"Thanks," said Arthur. "Delighted I'm sure."

"Aye, 'tis so," said Samson, germain to nothing which was apparent to his auditors. "Thou hast heard, belike," he added, turning to Elsie, "that Mrs. Tyler and Hetty ha' been mindin' house for me at the shop nigh ever sin I ha' been there, as it were."

"Yes, mother told me that in a letter."

"Aye, to be sure, 'twould be like 'en. Mrs. Tyler did take on above a bit when she heard as her man were taken for highway robbery, poor heart; an' Phil Rose were that kind there's no believin' on't."

"Dear old Phil, he is always kind," said Elsie.

"Aye, 'tis true, he be allus kind; but why a man o' sense, like Phil Rose, should allus be comin' to see me when he might know as I'd be away, be beyond me, an' 'tis only o' late since Missus Tyler an' Hetty ha' been wi' me as he's comed like this 'en, as it

were. Hast heard o' Mr. Crossthwaite, the parson, as married 'ee as t'were, i' the night as young master there were born ? ”

“ No,” said Arthur, suddenly interested, observing the amused expression on his aunt's face. “ What of the reverend divine ? ”

“ They do say as he be goin' wrong in the head ; but, Lord ! he never were much ; he were huntin' up an' down and in an' out the country after the man as stuck 'ee, an' were allus bringin' up the wrong'uns, about 'en. 'Tis said that be the cause on't. Oh ! an' I heard o' they priests i' Lunnon as thou didst gie me the money, for what they lent me, when I fetched 'ee like, in a manner o' puttin' en ; 'tis said by them here an' there as there's been plottin' among 'em ; not as you'd know aught about plottin', ma'am,” he added apologetically to the elder lady.

Whereupon Kirton chuckled audibly and Arthur cleared his throat.

“ What be the gentleman laughin' at ? ”

asked Samson innocently. This was too much even for the old lady, who joined good-naturedly in the merriment at her own expense.

“ Well,” said Samson, rising, “ I mun e’en go and see after the harness. ’Tis a pleasant talk we ’em been havin’ about what we did i’ old time, indeed. But ’tis martel strange to me like, Master Crosby, as ’ee can none remember aught about yon fellow as stuck ’ee ; like he let out thy brains for the time as it were ; ’tis strange for sure.”

“ Very,” said Arthur dryly.

THE END.

